

WORDS IN ACTION
IN TEN THOUSAND PLACES

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INTRODUCTION

THIS IS THE THIRD VOLUME of The Institute Series with the title *Words in Action*, and it completes the publication of the papers presented at a conference in London on 4th November 2008. The project, Words in Action, is devoted to strengthening the resources available to faith-based organizations, FBOs, to speak of their activity in language drawn from their faith context, and so resist being super-narrated by the secular language of public benefit, value added, and community cohesion.

The subtitle of this volume, *In Ten Thousand Places*, at first perhaps suggests that the actions about which we speak take place in many different places and give rise to many different conversations. That is borne out by the contributions to the project, in particular those collected here. Among the many places mentioned are South Sudan, Darfur, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, Zambia, Rwanda, to mention only examples from Africa, but Europe, Latin America, and Asia also figure. This richness of international experience is due in main part to the contributions of the two chief executives of international aid organizations, Christine Allen (Progressio) and Paul Chitnis (SCIAF). The places are many, not simply in geographic terms, but in the range of conversations in which words are in action. Representatives of FBOs speak with their own colleagues, with their partners and beneficiaries, with funders, with governments; with people of another faith, or of none, sometimes with people of the same faith but in dispute about the meaning and implications of their religion, with theologians in search of inspiration and perspective. The contribution of the two Muslim scholars, Sayyed Nadeem Kazmi and Shaykh Muhammad Amin-Evans, emphasise this complexity, both within any one faith, and in inter-faith dialogue. However, beyond the plurality of occasions, the principal significance of the subtitle is something else.

In Ten Thousand Places is taken from a sonnet by Gerard Manley Hopkins. 'As kingfishers catch fire ...' The earlier part of the poem celebrates the complexity and variety and beauty of reality, in which each thing acts according to what it is. Hopkins suggests that actions speak, and express the reality of the creature acting.

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

The poet extends the thought to apply it to the actions of a good person. The reality within is expressed in the deeds of service and kindness, but Hopkins interprets that reality in terms of his Christian faith: the actions of a just person express what she is, another Christ. With this he draws on the rich theology contained in St Paul's teaching that the Christian is to be conformed to Christ, has put on Christ, and is indeed another Christ.

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his going graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is –
Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places ...

The Words in Action project was occasioned by the observation that our actions motivated by our faith do indeed express who and what we are, but that they are not necessarily interpreted as such in our contemporary context. To be recognized fully for what they are, our actions require an additional commentary. And for that commentary we need to strengthen and sustain our resources of meaning and interpretation.

What has emerged from the project is that there is no simple polarization of religious and secular worlds, each with its own language. Certainly, there are issues around 'speaking in our own words' (No. 10) and 'finding the right words' (No. 11). But it is abundantly clear that there are many conversations going on, in different forums, between the many different stakeholders in the charitable activities with which we are concerned. This emerges in particular from the papers collected in this issue.

Peter Gilbert's paper on the place of spirituality in mental health might be expected to provide a clear example of a conversation between the domain of faith in the form of spirituality on one side, and the professional world of health care on the other. And indeed it does report on a process of acceptance by the psychiatric and health care establishment that the spiritual dimension is an integral part of psychic wellbeing, and therefore relevant to the healing process. To illustrate the integration of the spiritual with other dimensions of wellbeing Gilbert cites the character of Eric Liddle from *Chariots of Fire* who says of his running, 'when I run I feel His pleasure', a thought which resonates beautifully with Hopkins's Christ, playing 'in ten thousand places'.

Gilbert's paper also gives a glimpse of a debate going on within faith communities about the possibility of accommodating to a generic account of spirituality suitable for the health care profession and institutions without compromising the distinctiveness of the community's own beliefs. Some communities seem more willing than others, while some are more defensive. The defensive stance might well be motivated by protectiveness about the rich language of faith to prevent it being constrained in a standardized jargon. On the other hand, the readiness to engage with the health care establishment is perhaps motivated by a desire to take advantage of a unique opportunity to contribute rich words giving meaning to actions of care and concern. Alongside the conversation represented by the different members of health care teams, the chaplain and the carers, there is also a conversation between the chaplain and her co-religionists about the significance of what is said and done, and the appropriateness of how and where and with whom it is done. This diversity of conversations is replicated in the situations reported in other papers in the volume.

Christine Allen, chief executive of Progressio, tells a fascinating story of her organization's search for a new, more appropriate name, and the dynamic involved in adopting the chosen name. This story, too, in its way, illustrates the problem of words in action. The activities and public presence of the development aid organization formerly known as the Catholic Institute for International Relations

were not well served by this name, as the author recounts. The search for a new name was also a remembering of a history and a recovery of an identity. As Christine Allen tells the story it seems a perfect illustration of Hopkins' insight: 'what we do is who we are!' 'Unlike other organizations which changed their name to reflect a changed identity, we changed our name not to try and present a different face but to be more true to the organization that we are.' The choice of the new name *Progressio* more truly reflects the commitment to development aid, while at the same time evoking the encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Populorum progressio* (1967), On the Development of Peoples, the charter as it were for Catholic aid work.

As in the case of spirituality and health care, this story is not only about finding the right words with which to explain the organization to a secular world. It is also a story of inter Christian controversy as some Catholics wondered at the dropping of 'Catholic' and the adoption of a new name which did not clearly signal the confessional allegiance. This part of the story raises issues about belonging and participation as well as identity. The organization in its seventy years history was never an establishment of the Catholic hierarchy or an agent of the Church in a formal sense. Founded by lay Catholics disappointed with the leadership of the Church hierarchy in the face of the fascist threat, it has always appeared to offer another way of being church. Hence Allen's title, facing both ways, 'challenging the hierarchy to meet the expectations of the church community as well as challenging the state to respond to the principles of social justice central to Catholic social teaching and gospel values'.

Our reflections are strengthened by a contribution from another chief executive of a Catholic international aid organization, Paul Chitnis, chief executive of SCIAF. Internationally experienced in the work of Catholic charitable agencies, Chitnis elaborates on the multilingual competence required of faith-based organizations. The complete human development which is the objective of Catholic development agencies can be spoken of in secular terms or in the

language of faith, whether dealing with government or Church partners. The practitioners of aid must master both languages, facing both ways, as Christine Allen had remarked, but it is the same reality which is spoken of in each of them. He also draws attention to the need for a language for inter-faith conversations since both partners in delivery and the recipients of aid can come from other faith traditions.

As in the case of Progressio, SCIAF has also come under pressure from within the Catholic world, under the suspicion of being too humanitarian, and not sufficiently spiritual. This challenge is linked also to a discomfort felt by many believers when FBOs appear to engage in politics. Chitnis interprets the conversations arising in this context as belonging to the ongoing reception of Vatican II's revisioning of being Church in the World. Christians active in aid agencies model the realization of this vision, also when they take a political stance.

However, Paul also acknowledges that the practitioners of development aid require a spirituality which can nourish and sustain their commitment. He counsels that the drift from explicit mention of faith motivation, 'from prophecy to professionalism', may not be due so much to advancing secularization, but more to the lack of spiritual resources which speak to the reality of their situation. Our words in action must genuinely make sense for those who are active. His concluding quotation from Pope Paul VI points to such a vision which does make sense, and which can inspire the Christian's engagement in the world:

The Christian's hope comes primarily from the fact that he knows that the Lord is working with us in the world, [...] the Christian knows that others are at work, to undertake actions of justice and peace working for the same ends [...] in the heart of every person there is a will to live in brotherhood and a thirst for justice and peace, which is to be expanded.

This is the very same idea which Hopkins formulates in his poem: ‘... for Christ plays in ten thousand places [...] through the features of men’s faces’.

‘Actions speak louder’, or so the saying goes. Sayyed Nadeem Kazmi and Shaykh Muhammad Amin-Evans offer a distinctive reflection on words in action, highlighting the different sensibilities which Muslims and Christians bring to their encounter. Actions reflect attitudes of respect or indeed indifference, if not worse, and this applies in particular to the practices surrounding the handling of sacred words. They present a number of anecdotes which serve to highlight questions particularly relevant to the inter-faith encounter, but which can also be significant in any engagement with the ‘other’. Where there are differences in sensibility, the majority or dominant group should be aware of the danger of expecting that its sensibility or indeed language should form the common ground.

The stories they tell reflect situations in which the response to difference is either imposition or domination by the stronger group, or else denial altogether of the difference. They formulate a challenge to inter-faith dialogue that it not run away from difference, but be willing to name it and face it. They suggest also that the inability of different faith groups to deal honestly with their differences may be part of the reason why public authorities insist on setting the terms for engagement: ‘long before government agencies knock on our door we, the faith communities, have already opened it for reduction. It seems we are, sometimes, more concerned about the embarrassment of being different than dealing with the issue of difference’. Their reflection underlines the fact that the inter-faith dimension of the Words in Action project requires further development.

Oliver Davies’s theological reflection on the service of international aid also underlines the agenda still to be addressed. His contribution resonates with many of the concerns raised in other papers, for instance, his question about the significance of the Eucharist and his query about the appropriate spirituality for activists echo concerns raised by Paul Chitnis. There is potential here

for further exploration. As Professor of Christian Doctrine at King's College London, Oliver Davies is engaged with colleagues in developing a theology of transformation, and his contribution to the Words in Action project comes from this context. The action of which we speak, primarily the caritative action motivated by faith, is intended to make a difference in the world, in particular in the lives of those who are served, whose need most urgently calls out for assistance. Theology seeks to be engaged at those points where the world is being transformed, both to reflect on and understand what is going on, but most particularly to orient action.

The theological method which underlies this paper is one of transformation, and it focuses upon the ways in which human beings can change the world, through their own radical freedom, in situations of power and powerlessness. These are specifically situations in which freedom is in play, the freedom of act and decision, and where the world can become *this* world and not another.

The phenomenology of action with which Davies develops his theology provides plenty of opportunity for practitioners to recognize instances in their own experience which confirm the analysis presented here. For instance, drawing on a rich anthropology which elaborates the subjectivity of acting, Davies points to the experience of a deep solidarity which transcends the boundaries mentioned in his title. The recognition of solidarity is surely part of the compassionate engagement of those who come to the aid of others. There is rich experience here which can be drawn upon to enrich the theological reflection. The recognition of this solidarity gives a special resonance to the 'ten thousand places' in which people's faces express the same profound human reality, which the Christian can recognize as the presence of Christ.

There are other questions which wait to be pursued. Much of the work of care does indeed transform the world, and all caring certainly does, at least to the extent that a world without care for the need and suffering of others is very different from a world in which compassion guides action. But, as Paul Chitnis points out, accompaniment is a major part of the presence of aid workers and organizations to their partners. Being present, being-with, is not always intending to transform or to change anything. The ministry of concern in the context of health-care recognizes this tension especially in the face of death: the accompaniment of the dying person is often in tension with the dedication of the medical professionals to stave off death and sustain life as much as possible. The inevitability of death provides an extreme example, but there are many other situations conditioned by our bodiliness and mortality in which accompanying and being-present-with take precedence over changing or healing or transforming. Perhaps this is a question which can also be explored further concerning the contribution of spirituality in mental health care as propounded in Peter Gilbert's paper. Are there situations in which the chaplain or carer motivated by faith can provide an element of presence or accompaniment which is not intended to make a change or improve the diagnostic readings? This is not to suggest that professional health carers are incapable of such accompaniment. But certainly the words imbued with religious meaning can make sense of this very simple but real action. It would be very helpful to explore the ways in which a transformation theology can illuminate this dimension of action, which has always been an element of the Christian's self-understanding: *Stabat mater*...

Words in Action: In Ten Thousand Places is not the last word. It signposts paths of development which wait to be explored. It suggests models of different ways to be Church, alternative styles of doing theology, different ways of showing respect, different ways of speaking, myriad ways of being at play.

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PETER GILBERT

WORDS OF HEALING

SPIRITUALITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

WORDS OF HEALING: SPIRITUALITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

Peter GILBERT

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Introduction: Re-introducing the Spirit?

Every so often a book is published which can be described as seminal. Such a one is Professor John Swinton's: *Spirituality and Mental Health Care: Rediscovering a 'Forgotten' Dimension*, published in 2001.¹ Swinton, a Professor in practical theology at the University of Aberdeen with a background in psychiatric nursing and hospital and community chaplaincy, challenges a predominantly bio-medical model of mental health which has been largely pre-eminent since the 19th Century. Psychiatrists Patrick Bracken and Philip Thomas in their *Postpsychiatry* state that:

Academic psychiatry has become ever more focused on biological research, this has been become accompanied by a profound ideological commitment to what is known as reductionism. Reductionism is the belief that all sorts of events that happen at different levels of reality can be explained in terms of (i.e. reduced to) one type of knowledge.²

This has often led to people who experience a mental illness as having aspects of 'meaningful human behaviour (such as worries, regrets, fears, beliefs, hopes, loves and doubts)' explained 'in terms of "non-meaningful" entities such as genes, neurotransmitters and ultimately atoms and molecules.'³

- 1 Swinton, J., *Spirituality and Mental Health Care: Rediscovering a 'Forgotten' Dimension*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001.
- 2 Bracken, P. and Thomas P., *Postpsychiatry: Mental Health in a Post Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 14.
- 3 Ibid.

As an increasing number of intelligent and articulate users of services and survivors of mental distress have started to write and speak about their experiences, this reductionist view has been challenged; and, in fairness it must also be said, has been questioned by a range of mental health professionals, including psychiatrists. Clare Allan, who writes for *Guardian Society*, neatly sets out the dilemmas of diagnosis and identity:

I'm not suggesting for a second that mental illness is not a reality [NB some radical writers such as Thomas Szasz, suggested that it wasn't] ... What I'm saying is that human experience – because that's what it is, nothing more nothing less – can never be filed under neat diagnostic labels. And while diagnosis may serve some sort of purpose in helping doctors to group symptoms together and decide on a course of treatment, they can all too easily become a replacement for genuine understanding.⁴

Swinton asks the pertinent question as to why in an apparently secular, materialistic, consumerist⁵ and technologically orientated society, mental health professionals should take seriously something as 'apparently ethereal and "unscientific" as spirituality'?⁶ The answer to this question is varied. Part of it may indeed be a reaction to the society which Swinton and other commentators describe; it may also be to the very technocratic approaches to healthcare pursued both by the Thatcher and New Labour governments. But a number of other strands have appeared. One is that people generally appear to be asking 'what else is there?' besides materialism and the material world. David Hay's research in Nottingham demonstrates a huge resurgence of interest in the why and what questions: 'where did we come from,' 'why are we here,' 'what is our purpose in life' and 'where do we go to after life – if anywhere?'⁷

The 'Soul of Britain' survey showed that more than 76% of the population would admit to having had a spiritual experience, a 59% rise in response rate to this question compared to a decade previously.⁸ Television documentaries and dramas also seem to be fascinated with issues around the 'something there' phenomenon; though what we are to make of Martin Shaw's portrayal of an exorcist is another question!

Of course this can be very ephemeral, but after the financial crisis of Autumn 2008, where what has been described as casino capitalism fell prey to a combination of materialist greed and an apparently naïve belief by hard-nosed bankers that the good times would roll on for ever, and that hedge funds offering ludicrously high returns must be safe as well as spectacular; a number of

religious leaders, such as Pope Benedict XVI and the Archbishop of Canterbury in their 2008 Christmas messages pointed to the need to discover values which were not simply consumerist.

Swinton characterises Spirituality as having three main elements:

- Intra-personal – a quest for inner connectivity
- Inter-personal – the relationships between people and within communities
- Trans-personal – reaching beyond the self and others into transcendent experience.

Underpinning all of this is what concentration camp survivor and psycho-therapist, Viktor Frankl, spoke of as *Man's Search for Meaning*.⁹ Frankl makes clear that human beings' search for meaning is not some sort of by-product, but the essential quest. This exploration can of course take place within a religious or secular tradition, or it may be more of an individual pilgrimage. Perhaps one of the most fascinating historical accounts touching on this is Rod Kedward's *La Vie en Bleu*.¹⁰ Dr Kedward considers how a range of social, political and religious groups in French society, in the twentieth century, grapples with issues of meaning and identity.

Interestingly, it is in many ways psychiatry as a profession which has taken a lead. In 1991 Prince Charles, in his annual address to the annual meeting of The Royal College of Psychiatrists (of which he was the patron) urged the College to consider the spiritual dimension. Or psychiatry could 'lose its way'.¹¹ Psychiatrists from a range of different countries and cultures also brought into play their personal and professional belief that the spiritual dimension could not simply be ignored.

Also in 2001, the National Institute for Mental Health in England's (NIMHE) project on spirituality and mental health was set up by Professor Anthony Sheehan. NIMHE was created to assist in the development of mental

4 Allan, C., 'Defining Moment', *Society Guardian*, 19th April 2006.

5 See Bauman, Z., *Consuming Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

6 Swinton, 2001, p. 7

7 Hay, D., *Something There: The Biology of the Human Spirit*. Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006.

8 Hay, D. and Hunt, K., 'Is Britain's soul waking up', *The Tablet*, 24th June, 2000.

9 Frankl, V.E., *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959, 1984.

10 Kedward, R., *La Vie en Bleu*. London: Penguin, 2006.

11 Cox, J., 'Psychiatry and religion: breaking the taboo', *The John Young Lecture*, 16th October 2008.

health services (see below) and Professor Sheehan wished to see development which took in the whole person and the whole systems approach. The initiative was partly as a result of intense discussions following the traumatic events of 9/11 in the United States; but also partly due to a recognition that issues of religious faith and individual spirituality could not simply be addressed within the developing race equality programme. Much of the intensive work of the project is contained in the publication: *Spirituality Values and Mental Health: Jewels for the Journey*, published at the end of 2007, and in many ways the child of Swinton's seminal work.¹²

The challenge of mental health

There are many fascinating questions about mental health: why, if mental illness is so prevalent do we fear it so much? What is the continuum between being mentally healthy and mentally unwell? Is extreme sadness part of our evolutionary make-up to increase our mental strength in the long term? What language should we use to describe mental ill health?

A most fascinating piece of writing, in my view, is Dr Lewis Wolpert's account of his experience of depression. Wolpert is a distinguished embryologist, Professor of Biology as Applied to Medicine at University College London. At the height of his career he experienced a severe episode of depression. He recalls that his wife tried to hide this from colleagues because she was concerned that a mental illness would adversely affect his career. Looking back at this experience he recalls:

I am continually amazed at how widespread depression is. Because I have gone public about my depression, it is very rare for me to meet someone socially who during discussion does not reveal that they have some contact with depression – a relative, a friend or even themselves.¹³

I can identify with this. My running club has on its website my article about spirituality, mental health and exercise, which contains my own experience of depression in 2000 and 2001.¹⁴ Partly because of this I find a considerable number of people talk to me about the issues which affect them, sometimes on long runs when there is the sense of 'protected time'. Wolpert, in an extraordinary piece of expressive writing says the following:

If we had a soul – and as a hard-line materialist I do not believe we do – a useful metaphor for depression could

be ‘soul loss’ due to extreme sadness. The body and mind emptied of the soul lose interest in almost everything except themselves. The idea of the wandering soul is widely accepted across numerous cultures and the adjective ‘empty’ is viewed across most cultures as negative... our ‘soul’ is our inner essence, something distinctly different from the hard material world in which we live. Lose it and we are depressed, cut off and alone.¹⁵

The use of philosophical or religious language here is very striking, as well as very poetic and meaningful for anybody who has had a similar experience. It is fascinating that someone who describes themselves as ‘a hard-line materialist’ should wish to use such language, or perhaps find that no other language is adequate. Perhaps it is not surprising then that spiritual and religious themes make themselves manifest and return to weave through part of the story of mental health.

Ancient Greek and Jewish societies often regarded the mutterings of those who were not in a rational state as a gift of the Gods. Plato quotes Socrates as preaching that: ‘The greatest blessings come by way of madness, indeed of madness that is heaven sent.’¹⁶

Jewish society also accorded respect even reverence to those thought to be uttering what might be prophecies; and Mosaic Law recognised the appointment of guardians for those who were not in possession of their faculties. Mediaeval Christianity afforded sanctuary for people with mental and learning disabilities in the spaces around the monasteries. The dissolution of the monasteries had a profoundly adverse affect on many vulnerable people. Midwinter, in his overview of British social history, points out that ‘the part of charity in religious life weakened with the advent of the Protestant creeds, with their emphasis on self-help and salvation.’¹⁷

Alms houses then began to offer succour, but to a much more specific, and often ‘acceptable’ group of vulnerable people. Many of those suffering from mental distress or learning disabilities ended up in general parish poorhouses,

12 Coyte, M.E., Gilbert, P. and Nicholls, V., *Spirituality, Values and Mental Health: Jewels for the Journey*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2007.

13 Wolpert, L., *Malignant Sadness: The Anatomy of Depression*. 3rd edition, London: Faber and Faber, 2006, p. vii.

14 Coyte, Gilbert and Nicholls, 2007, Chapter 10.

15 Wolpert, 2006, p. 3.

16 Plato, *Phaedrus*, quoted in Gilbert and Scragg, *Managing to Care*. Sutton: Community Care, BPI, 1992, p. 27.

17 Midwinter, E., *The Development of Social Welfare in Britain*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994, p. 33.

and later workhouses. It was The Society of Friends (Quakers) who then set up the Retreat at York in 1796, which set a standard for a humane approach to treatment and care.

Allan, in her *Guardian Society* article asks why it is mental rather than physical ill health which is so stigmatised. Goffman talks about the issue of *Spoiled Identity*.¹⁸ Perhaps it is because we originated in small tribal groups where survival depended on spotting and reacting to difference, that apparently irrational behaviour is so disturbing to us. What is true is that mental health legislation in the United Kingdom has been marked by two major preoccupations, that around the liberty for the individual; and the safety of the individual and of society at large. As we move through an era where the Victorian asylums have largely been closed and specialist teams now attempt to service people's needs within community settings, issues around safety and liberty were very prevalent in the construction of the 2007 Mental Health Act.

One of the major challenges still highly prevalent is the issue of discrimination affecting people from black and ethnic minorities. Another related challenge is that mental ill health is a major area of stigma within a number of ethnic/faith groups. Combating this stigma and creating more cooperative relations between faith communities and mental health services is one of the major challenges of the next decade. This challenge is being tackled imaginatively by a research and development project by Birmingham and Solihull MHF Trust, and initiated by its Medical Director, Dr Neil Deuchar.¹⁹

Religion/spirituality and mental health

'Spirituality' is not that easy to define. The Royal College of Psychiatrists leaflet talks about an attempt to be in harmony with the universe, striving for answers about the infinite and for a desire for wholeness.²⁰ Some religious leaders feel that it is too loose in its meaning and a recent briefing note on Roman Catholic chaplaincy states baldly that:

there is a flawed anthropology that sees man (sic) as a spiritual being with a chosen religion bolted on. To people of all religious faiths this characterization is unrecognizable. Rather the spiritual dimension can only be made sense of through the particular religious belief.²¹

The problem with this definition, of course, is that most religions were not founded as religions as such. Organized religions followed their founder, and the etymology of religion is from *religare*, in Latin, 'to bind fast, in the sense of

place an obligation on'. Founders of the world religions tapped into an innate spiritual sense in the people that they were speaking to, quite often challenging religions and/or philosophical systems that were prevalent at the time.²²

Perhaps, more helpfully, we can see the two as often inter-linking partners rather than rivals. In fact, religions which attack the notion of spirituality are in many ways undermining themselves. Swinton talks about 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' religion. Intrinsic religiousness sees faith and the following of the moral values, rites, rituals and sacraments of the faith as something which connects the individual positively to fellow human beings and the wider society. This is very effectively expressed by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his various works.²³ Extrinsic religion on the contrary is self-serving, in that it uses the structure of the faith to provide a psychological comfort blanket and insurance policy. It produces the kind of faith communities where people are likely to remark: 'the founder of the religion would not find a welcome here!'

Research mainly undertaken in America by people such as Harold Koenig set out clearly how religious belief, and membership of a welcoming and nurturing faith community, can be positive in terms of physical and mental health and longevity, and recovery from physical and mental ill health.²⁴

Professor Andrew Sims summarizes what accounts for the benefits as follows:

- Social benefits: a sense of belonging
- Trust in God and a sense of 'rightness' and the security this gives
- Internal levels of control – e.g. the spirit of the divine and/or moral purpose within me helps me to exert my own will to do better.²⁵

Much of the research is USA-based, and is conducted on homogenous religious communities. There is less coherent and compelling evidence in the

18 Goffman, E., *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. London: Penguin, 1963, 1990.

19 see Parkes, Gilbert and Thomas, 2009, forthcoming.

20 The Royal College of Psychiatrists, *Spirituality and Mental Health*. London: Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2006.

21 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Spirituality and RC Chaplaincy: Parliamentary Brief No. 3*. London: CBCEW, 2008, p. 2.

22 Armstrong, K., *A History of God*. London: Vintage, 1999.

23 Sacks, J., *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility*. London: Continuum, 2005.

24 Koenig, H.G., McCullough, M.E. and Larson, D.B., *Handbook of Religion and Health*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

25 Sims, A., 'Spirituality and Mental Health', Talk to the Midlands and Trent Region of The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 6th December 2008.

UK, though there is some, and this is an issue which will need to be addressed urgently over the next few years. Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation NHS Trust are tackling this by setting up a specific research project, allied to its Chaplaincy/Spiritual and Pastoral Care Team which will look at aspects such as:

- What are the elements of a helpful spiritual assessment?
- How can we help staff to recognise and relate to people's spiritual dimension?
- Is it helpful to have spiritual care specialists relating to staff teams?
- What spiritual practices are helpful to people at a time of mental distress?
- How can the Trust work best with different faith communities?

Work has already taken place with Imams in the City to assist in a mutual understanding of mental health and the needs of the Muslim communities. In 2009 a new project will take place to link with a large Sikh Gurdwara in the City, again to create more effective links.

The NIMHE 'Spirituality and Mental Health Project'

One of the fascinating aspects of this Project is how it has been driven by a groundswell of services users, carers and front line staff. I have to admit that my role as Project Lead was entirely accidental. Having joined the core group setting up NIMHE in the autumn of 2001 to advise on social care issues (as a qualified social worker and an ex-director of social services), it was only after 9/11 and a recognition that this was an area that needed attention that I was asked to 'hold' the issue by Professor Anthony Sheehan, the Chief Executive setting up NIMHE.

As I went around the countryside exploring the issue I was struck that the question I was most often asked was: 'are we allowed to talk about issues of spirituality and faith?' My response to that was 'why not?' and their response to that was: 'well we haven't been allowed to talk about it before. If you mention God or aspects of spirituality the staff are likely to up your medication!' This whole aspect is beautifully captured in Sue Holt's poem, extract from 'Year 2000 on a Section 3':

I was excited today was the Lord's birthday
and I was going home for dinner.
I masked my emotions
otherwise they would keep me.
I have to behave myself today,
no talking of God
and of his plans for me ...²⁶

So, if this was the atmosphere, the project might be described as an exercise in 'strategic permission'. Over the last eight years it has focused on two main issues:

1. Spirituality as an expression of individuals' essential humanity, and the well-springs of how they live their lives and deal with crises.
2. The establishment of positive relations with the main religions, at a time when a harmonious construct between statutory agencies and faith communities is essential.

Some of the main aspects of the Project have been:

setting up a number of pilot sites to explore these issues;
connecting with development centres and universities as interest in the subject grows;
setting up a series of multi-faith conferences;²⁷
attempting to influence the curriculum formation for professional groups;
working with and supporting chaplains (from all faiths);
providing guidelines for staff.²⁸

Work between statutory services and faith communities

The National Project has worked to increase mutual understanding between services and faiths. The first multi-faith conference in November 2006, held at Staffordshire University was the first conference world-wide to gather together the nine major faiths (those liaised with by the Department of Health), the Humanists and a strong user voice to consider the different systems of belief and their relationship with mental health.²⁹ This was a complex exercise, requiring

²⁶ Holt, S., *Poems of Survival*. Brentwood: Chipmunk Publishing, 2003.

²⁷ Gilbert, P. and Kalaga, H., *Nurturing Heart and Spirit: Papers from the Multi-faith Symposium*. Stafford: Staffordshire University/CSIP, September, 2007.

²⁸ Gilbert, P., Hayes, L. and Merchant, R., *Guidelines on Spirituality for Staff in Acute Care Services*. NIMHE, 2008.

²⁹ Gilbert, P. and Kalaga, H., *Nurturing Heart and Spirit*, 2007.

a very specific approach, and I have written this up in detail in a paper for the *Journal of Integrated Care*.³⁰ The National Spirituality and Mental Health Forum was initially set up in the 1990s under the auspices of The Health Education Authority, and is now an independent charity.³¹ The Forum's quarterly sessions provide a focus for inter-faith discussions.

At a time when many people are disillusioned with a materialist society, the need for a more spiritual approach which is community focused, not simply individualistic, is an imperative for what might be called the re-moralization of society.³² The ongoing financial crisis since 2007 is likely to intensify the disillusionment, because, in a society which has become 'consuming life' to use Bauman's phrase, the lack of ability to consume cuts out the very heart of the modern meaning of life. Approaches as set out by documents such as *Gaudium et spes*, and the writings of the Chief Rabbi, could provide a rediscovered way of leading life. For this to happen, however, there needs to be a sense of humility from the world religions. Considerable benefits from religious belief and community membership have been verified, as we have seen.

There is a contrary view, however, from practitioners such as Dorothy Rowe, and from a number of services users.³³ One service user, at a conference in Sussex, in the autumn of 2008, to launch the guidelines on spirituality produced by NIMHE and Staffordshire University, retailed the following:

I felt that I had been abused by the religious faith I grew up in, and that abuse has scarred my life. When I became ill, I approached the mental health services and hoped that they would provide me with a framework and a safe haven in which I could discuss the traumas that I had been through. They gave me medication, which I found helpful in relieving my symptoms, but that's all they gave me. Nobody afforded me any time to listen to me and explore the issues I had.

In essence, then this individual had been failed both by religion and by the secular and scientific institutions. We know that the downside of individual spirituality can be to become overly self absorbed and self-centred. Organized religion can be oppressive, and certainly is more often than not patriarchal. Many people with mental health issues are suspicious of organized religion because of their experiences, but wish to have their spiritual dimension attended to. At a time of a health-related crisis, especially mental health or approaching death, people, who may have lost a religious faith may be wishing to return to it in some form, but with their suspicions not yet allayed. An overly officious approach is

neither helpful nor appropriate, and may indeed be dangerous in the case of very vulnerable people. The *Words in Action* project, and events such as Staffordshire University (and its partners in the National Forum and NIMHE) third national Multi-faith conference: *The Flourishing City-The role of spirituality in regeneration* are vital in assisting the essential dialogue between faith communities and secular agencies in what Government officially recognises as a multicultural and multi faith society. A defensive and ghettoised approach, which makes sweeping assumptions about both the nature of faith and humankind's appreciation of the transcendent, and also about the integrity of secular organizations, and especially chaplains who work for them, is simply unhelpful and will not work in the long term.

A positive approach was taken recently by one of the Sikh communities in Birmingham, which freely acknowledged the problem of stigma within their own faith setting; expressed the desire to work in partnership with the local mental health trust; and explicitly looked to the future appointment of part time chaplains from the faith community, who could both address the specific needs of people of their faith within a service setting and also play a part in the wider team. The Birmingham and Solihull, MHF Trust are committed to working with the Soho Road Gurdwara to consider their specific religious and cultural needs. An effective partnership between faith communities and secular services, which work towards better health and hope for people who use services, and people who through that partnership may never actually need to use the services because of the community support they receive, can only be achieved through an honest sense of faith identity, but also a reaching out to people of good will. As ever, religions need to model themselves on the attributes and values of their founders.

The fact that some people now turn to a range of spiritual practices as well as, or instead of, a straight adherence to a formal religion appears to have annoyed and/or concerned some religious leaders. One hears remarks that Spirituality is 'self referential', but this is only partly so and seems to reflect a kind of insecurity which sets up barriers. Perhaps it would be better to see a helpful alliance between all who see human beings as more than mere 'consumers' of material goods.

30 Gilbert, P., 'Engaging hearts and minds... and the spirit', *The Journal of Integrated Care*. Volume 5, Issue 4, August, 2007.

31 Aaron, M., *The National Spirituality and Mental Health Forum: A Brief Background and History of the Forum*. October, 2006.

32 Himmelfarb, G., *The Demoralisation of Society*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1994.

33 Rowe, D., *What Should I Believe: Why Our Beliefs About the Nature of Death and the Purpose of Life Dominate Our Lives*. London: Routledge, 2009.

But surely the real challenge for patriarchal and hierarchical religious groups is that people might think for themselves? The Bishop of Lancaster recently lambasted Catholics who had had a university education for undermining the Church. In fact, as Michael Kelly points out in a recent study of one national Church, it is often when religious groups become secretive and controlling that moral authority and what Kelly calls the 'moral voice' is lost (Kelly, 2008).³⁴

The Divine Spirit has often been treated with suspicion in some circles because the Spirit goes where it wills. But the interaction of the divine and the human is always more complex than structures, and, as government has found to its cost in healthcare, structural solutions often cause more problems than the original challenges unless relationships are worked on as well. The Healthcare Commission's recent highlighting of the dreadful effects of a mechanistic response to target setting at Stafford DGH is a case in point. It is profoundly worrying that the Foundation Trust regulator, Monitor, apparently saw nothing of concern in the hospital's performance!

Kedward points out that in the inter-war years in France, Catholic organizations urged not only the benefits of faith but outdoor, communal and vocational activities as an aid to 'spiritual regeneration'.³⁵ Eric Liddle, the Christian evangelist and Olympic gold medallist made it very clear that he was committed both to his faith and his running and that there was a connection to each other. As the script in the film *Chariots of Fire* puts it: 'God made me for a purpose (i.e. missionary work) but He also made me fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure'. This combination of faith-based and naturalistic spirituality makes sense to me as during my depression I was able to seek solace at the Benedictine Abbey of Worth in Sussex, but also at another significant community, my local running club, Black Pear Joggers (Worcester), where running with supportive friends was also a healing spiritual experience. Both were connected. Both were essential to me and one alone would not have been sufficient. Communion is a broad concept.

For people with a mental illness, the interaction between faith and spirituality in its broadest sense is likely to play a major part in recovery. As a service user in Sussex put it recently: 'My faith has been my anchor through my illness, now I can look forward not back'.³⁶

But for some people a religious organization may have been at the root of their problems. Others may have drifted from their faith, but wish to explore a return, while tentative about receiving a dogmatic reaction. For many the chance to explore their spiritual dimension in a non-threatening, listening and non-dogmatic atmosphere may be most helpful. In such circumstances it is vital that the Head of Spiritual and Pastoral Care in a mental health trust has access to chaplains from the specific religious faiths and generic chaplains as well. The team will need to know when a specific faith response is required, but also a

chaplain who responds by saying ‘I only deal with my lot!’ is not doing anyone’s mental health any good.

In a moving article concerning the recent death of her father, Jenni Russell describes the challenges of a society which has ‘no mechanisms to signify our sadness.’³⁷ Chaplaincy in healthcare is a visible sign of God’s love. Our call-sign in mental wellbeing should be not: ‘Abandon hope all ye who enter here!’, but: ‘All are welcome in this house of heart and spirit.’

34 Kelly, M., ‘Can the Irish Church Survive?’ *The Tablet*, 31st January, 2008, pp. 12–13.

35 Kedward, *La Vie en Bleu*, p. 192.

36 Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, *Spirituality Strategy: Our Vision for Spiritual and Religious Care*. Sussex, November 2008.

37 Russell, J., ‘Shorn of the Rituals of Old, Death Maroons us in Grief’, *The Guardian*, 2nd January, 2009.

CHRISTINE ALLEN

FACING BOTH WAYS

NAVIGATING AN OPEN SPACE

FACING BOTH WAYS: NAVIGATING AN OPEN SPACE

Christine ALLEN

Christine Allen is chief executive of Progressio

Introduction

The Words in Action project is seeking to find ways in which religious or faith-based organizations can find an articulation of their work and ethos, in an inclusive way. The project is grappling with issues of identity, of belonging and being independent, of inclusion and perceptions of exclusion. There is a great deal in this project that reflects some of the challenges and issues that Progressio (formerly CIIR) is grappling with too.

I write this article as an illustration of one organization's on-going journey – it is our own story in the making. I offer it in the hope that it might give some insights and perceptions of value to others. However, it is just one organization's story, and as this project makes clear to us, there is a great diversity of religious or faith-based organizations. Perhaps to some extent part of the challenge we all face is the lack of understanding of that diversity and complexity both from outside and from inside the church communities where we work.

Civil society and the voluntary sector is a diverse and multifaceted domain. Faith-based and religious organizations themselves reflect that diversity, so there is little to be helped by sweeping generalizations. But many of us are often tarred by the brush of sweeping generalization! It is worth starting with Malcolm Torry's useful and helpful distinction between religious and faith-based organizations. He says, religious organizations are much more 'owned' by and connected to the official structures of the faith tradition and their primary purpose is much more connected with the central mission of the faith (often worship). FBOs, he argues, may be more or less connected to the faith structures, but their primary purpose is not worship, but the delivery of services, advocating for change or some other activity. Whatever the activity, it is concerned with the much broader, often social mission of the faith. Within this, he offers another typology – that of the strength of the connection of the particular organization with the founding faith. He talks of organizations that have 'wandered' much more and found themselves (or moved themselves deliberately) into the secular field.

Whilst this is helpful, I do find myself rebelling a bit against the typology of the ‘wandering’. Organizations are always on a journey and religious foundations and ethos may need to be reinterpreted in new and changing contexts. What may seem to be wandering for some may be a re-affirmation for others.

Progressio’s journey

Perhaps my discomfort is because I am not sure where Progressio fits. Progressio is not a church founded organization which has somehow ‘wandered’ into the realm of the secular. It began already on the borderline. It is part of the church, but not an official organ of the hierarchy. To some extent it has a special place, facing both ways as it were, challenging the hierarchy to meet the expectations of the church community as well as challenging the state to respond to the principles of social justice central to Catholic social teaching and gospel values. It has strong faith roots, but prides itself on being able to work with people of all faiths and none in an inclusive way.

So, the founding story of Progressio is an important part of the story and of our journey-in-the-making, which is our activity today. We have always been focused on an agenda of social justice. When founded, in 1940, it was a small group of lay Catholics, with support of Cardinal Hinsley, who were concerned at the silence of the hierarchy despite the rise of fascism across Europe. We were called ‘The Sword of the Spirit’. Since then the concern for ‘just moral order’ in Europe has widened to an international focus, to a broader development remit but one that encompasses a strong sense that good governance and just politics are at the heart of sustainable development. In 1965 we became the Catholic Institute for International Relations and in 2006 adopted Progressio as a working name for now, but we will take the full name change to the membership in the near future.

We have been through three names in 70 years. Each represents a shift in the organizational story, not a shift in ethos or values. To some extent the change in name each time came about as a result of the ethos and values and a desire to make the nature of the organization clearer and more relevant to its time and context.

Values, ethos and models of church

As an organization we combine the values and inspiration of our Catholic heritage (from Catholic social teaching and scripture) with the best development thinking and practice. We are proud of our religious roots and although work from the religious inspiration, are also proud to work with people of all

faiths and none, embracing the secular and working with it in a shared task of development.

The principles and values come from social teaching in papal encyclicals such as *Populorum progressio* (1967) and *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) and the thinking surrounding the preferential option for the poor which came especially from the Latin American Bishops and more recent encyclicals. There are other key documents such as the *Kairos Document* where the role of the church in moments of oppression and liberation (as in apartheid South Africa) is discussed. Some critics argue that to make such a focus on the social teaching of the Church doesn't tell the full story, but it is a rich heritage of teaching that is the Church's best kept secret.

Our principles and values – solidarity and justice, integrity and respect, courage and commitment – are rooted in Catholic social teaching and the gospel, and we have worked so that all staff know and understand where they come from. But these are human values, shared by people of all faiths and none. There is no Catholic monopoly on justice. Indeed, we need to recognise that for many people the Catholic Church has been or is often found wanting on certain issues of social justice. For indigenous communities in Latin America for whom the conquest isn't a far distant memory, but a daily struggle for survival, to the Muslim communities who fear the Christian is on a modern Crusade and seeks to proselytise, via child abuse and a controversial position on HIV, we have to recognise that fear, ignorance or even antipathy towards the church isn't unfounded. So the faith-based organization doesn't just carry its own reality, it has to carry the history and expectations of the whole faith tradition and community. That history and those expectations can be very diverse and have no relation to the reality of the organization itself.

Throughout Progressio's history, we have seen that diversity. Right from our founding days we have sought to 'speak truth to power' and the power would also be the Church as well as the state. From those founding moments, when the members of Sword of the Spirit sought to bring the Catholic voice to society when they felt the Church leaders were not doing so, there have also been other times throughout our history when Church institutions were divided. In recent times in Central America, South Africa, Philippines and East Timor we have supported churches and Christian people to take a stand on matters of human rights and political justice. For us, religious institutions have to engage with and respond to the political, social and economic contexts of the world. Nothing new there. But perhaps today our context is one where some people want religion to be privatised or removed from the public sphere, in which case it is a more contentious model of church. So perhaps the issue is not whether we are religious, but the kind of religion we represent that attracts the critics.

An illustration: In apartheid South Africa the churches were on both sides of the divide, and many were struggling with the challenges of the injustice. Albert Nolan, in a pamphlet produced by CIIR as we were then, called *Taking Sides*, memorably talked about the challenges of Christians in the face of injustice – we are either on the cross or watching from the sidelines. There are those within the religious community that would struggle with such a message, and therein lies the rub. We are being criticised by the people who think religion shouldn't be so public, and we are criticised by those who think that religion should be concerned with spiritual wellbeing or welfare and not matters of social justice. So, the issue is not whether we are religious enough, but that faith-based organizations offer a different model of what church or religion is about.

Facing both ways

Whilst we come from a faith context, Progressio has always been concerned about the world and is looking out. It addresses the hierarchy with hard questions. In the 1940s those questions were about fascism, and subsequently they have been about models of development and what justice means for a developing world.

Nor is it a history like other charities that have come from the faith context to minister to those in need. It is concerned about the world and how the Church engages with the world, so that both can be more just. In the context of the Words in Action project, Progressio 'faces both ways'.

As a result, the organization has to navigate a space between those two worlds. This can be very challenging as the parameters or boundaries are not always that clear. An organization that is the agency of the Bishops Conference, for instance, speaks and acts to some extent on behalf of the hierarchy. This is something Progressio does not do. But we are very much part of the body of the Church and to that extent, seek to ensure that our work is in keeping with the values and principles of social teaching and the gospel. To put it rather simplistically, what this boils down to is that for some people, we are too Catholic, for others we are not Catholic enough.

It has taken, and continues to take, a concerted effort at understanding where we have come from, but also to translate that Christian and specifically Catholic ethos into values that are accessible and adoptable by people of all faiths and none. That isn't easy and requires a certain level of bilingualism (although when you add in development jargon, it becomes multilingualism).

Our purpose is good, solid and transformatory development. We seek the full humanity for all – that means more than just the basics of life, but rights being respected and people having a degree of control over their lives. It means em-

powering people and local organizations with skills so that they can determine and influence what are the best services, policies and mechanisms to improve their own lives and the lives of their communities. All this is done with respect for people and as far as possible, for their culture, beliefs and traditions. I feel confident – along with our members and supporters – that this is entirely in keeping with our Catholic tradition and teaching. But perhaps there are some that feel this sort of mission needs an explicitly Catholic label.

Rationale for our name change

When we changed our name from CIIR to Progressio, was it then just about losing the Catholic label? Organizations face constant challenges to keep true to their purposes and foundations, in situations where contexts are constantly changing. This does mean a regular need for re-invention and it may even mean trustees have to face closing an organization. Organizations do change and they should. Their very engagement in a situation *should* result in that situation changing, otherwise the organization's people ought to be asking themselves why they are there and what difference they are making. It may be a matter of updating language, services, market niche, target audience or methods of delivery.

Either way, it requires flexibility and adaptation. This is a natural process of organizational development and is something that applies to all organizations, regardless of their faith base. Progressio is our third name change in seventy years, but throughout we have tried to keep true to the founding vision, despite radically shifting contexts.

Unlike other organizations which changed their name to reflect a changed identity, we changed our name not to try and present a different face but to be more true to the organization that we were. Our old name did not reflect what we did. Catholic Institute for International Relations made us sound like a think-tank, a dry and dusty diplomatic service for the Vatican, or an academic department staffed by Catholics. It didn't say that we were a progressive international development service with staff and volunteer professionals in eleven countries around the world making a difference to the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. It didn't say that we work with people of all faiths and none but rather sounded exclusive and excluding.

Furthermore in the Muslim countries where we work, we couldn't use the CIIR name at all so our international programme had a different name. Organizationally we were operating with two names – a branding nightmare at the best of times – but in our case, it created an internal and artificial division around the issue of faith which was unhelpful to say the least. Something had to be done to

unify the organization, to replenish our identity and stabilise our brand and to communicate what we were.

We went through the usual process, with the aid of some pro-bono skilled brand managers. I learned a lot. We had already done two years' worth of going back to our vision, mission and values as an organization. We had already addressed the fact that our faith roots mattered to us, that we were an organization concerned about development and justice, and that we were committed to working across faith boundaries with all people of goodwill. So we wanted to find a name that could communicate all that and because that hard work had already been done, the rest came much more easily than is often the case. This work gave the brand managers entry points from which they could work out potential names. Hundreds of names later we had a short list, from which we were able to go with *Progressio* which we now own as a trademark.

Why *Progressio*? It communicates progress and development; it says progressive and forward-thinking; it implies energy and dynamism. It is Latin so it can translate well into Spanish for the Latin American countries, and doesn't mean anything offensive in Arabic. Most importantly it has the resonance with that small section of the Catholic community that knows about social teaching, of *Populorum progressio*, the encyclical written by Paul VI in 1967.

The new name has given us a space internally to reflect positively on the organization's history, its relationship to the Church and the role and inspiration of Catholic social teaching. It has been hard work, and it will continue to be a dialogue – as it should be. Now the discussion with people about *Progressio* is generally more positive. In the past we would spend a lot of time slightly on the defensive – 'no, we're not an institution, we're part of the Church but not an official agency, we're a development organization, not a think-tank' and so on.

Adopting a new name doesn't necessarily mean that the organization has moved away from its original ethos. I think in our case, we've been able to reaffirm a lot of our history and ethos. But some people – generally those people not connected with the organization – assumed that it was move away from our foundations.

Carrying the messages not our own

Any faith-based organization carries the expectations of the broader constituency, not just those of its own members or supporters. Regardless of whether an organization has 'wandered' or not, its faith base gives it roots and a supporting constituency. Some of the constituency have a real relationship with the organization – they are members, supporters etc. Others just feel that they have a relationship with or call on the organization by virtue of its name or

faith connections, even if there is no actual membership or financial support involved – or even any real understanding of the work of the organization. As I mentioned before, this carrying of broader expectations can be problematic. Where the wider community or constituency becomes a stakeholder in the direction of the organization but without the connectedness that a stakeholder usually has it can be particularly difficult.

When the name Progressio was adopted, certain parts of the Catholic press ran it as a story about us dropping the ‘Catholic’ from the name. There were a number of implications, but there was the sense that the wider Catholic constituency had a say about the name (and our work etc.) simply by virtue of being Catholic. Regardless of whether the membership and other key stakeholders were supportive, this wider group felt they had the right to comment. In practice it was helpful, and gave me a platform to explain the rationale in a way I would not have otherwise done, but it might not have been. It went beyond transparency to the view that as a faith-based organization we were accountable to the whole of the faith constituency, not just our members and supporters.

What do names say?

Organizations want to find names that reflect their purpose and ethos and speak in contexts so it is not surprising that there are name changes. For faith-based organizations I think some of the name changes have been because when they were formed they often had an explicit faith label that has begun to mean something different as contexts have changed. Those organizations have moved away from the explicit label because they don’t want to appear to be exclusive or excluding. When they offer services to people regardless of faith, they want to make sure that is how it is understood in a world where faith is often seen in negative and inward terms. We are one example, Marriage Care used to be called Catholic Marriage Advisory Council; Housing Justice is another – the new ecumenical version of the Catholic Housing Aid Society, formed as a result of the merger of CHAS and the Churches National Housing Coalition. But I know that the CHAS advice centres always struggled with the Catholic label as people would come to them for housing advice and the first question would be ‘I’m not Catholic, will you still help me?’ The answer being a resounding ‘of course we will’. It made the staff wonder how many people were not being helped because our name sounds as if we are not a service for them?

In the 1960s, when many of the Catholic social action organizations came into being, the Catholic label was a sign of the Church being outward looking. Today, it is interpreted as a signal of exclusion. Perhaps, forty years ago, with the Second Vatican Council, the context was one of the Church reaching out,

or perhaps there was less awareness of just how excluding it sounded. But today, the label signifies not mission, but territory. To label something is to limit it, and our faith cannot, and should not, be limited.

CIIR or Progressio? I mentioned before the starting point of any conversations with people who didn't know CIIR, was an uphill struggle to explain what we really were. By contrast then, the name Progressio shows just how well we can 'face both ways' and have the dialogue with different audiences. Through hard work with the staff and partners and our stakeholders, we can translate from one language to another.

That multilingualism isn't easy, but the issues we face are more than just those of language. Faith-based organizations face barriers because of the wider attitude to religion especially in the current climate and the difficulties of carrying expectations and messages that go beyond the organization (and therefore its control). We have to overcome a number of barriers through expectations, ignorance and perhaps prejudice before we even reach the conversations. For Progressio, the change of name meant that the dialogue is there before the walls are there, and that's a big step forward.

PAUL CHITNIS

KEEPING THE FAITH

A DEVELOPMENT AGENCY'S
EXPERIENCE OF WORKING
IN A SECULAR SOCIETY

KEEPING THE FAITH:

A DEVELOPMENT AGENCY'S EXPERIENCE OF WORKING IN A SECULAR SOCIETY

Paul CHITNIS

Paul Chitnis is Chief Executive of SCIAF, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund. From 2005–2008, he was President of the global network of Catholic development agencies, CIDSE. He has also worked for Christian Aid and the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust, and is Director of an ecumenical organization, Scottish Churches World Exchange.

Introduction

SCIAF, or to use its full title, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, is Scotland's leading aid agency. Established in 1965, we supported work in around 25 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America in 2008. We work through local partner organizations wherever possible because we believe this is the most effective and sustainable way of addressing people's needs. SCIAF's funding is not confined to Catholic organizations and there is no requirement from our governing Board for us to do so. Indeed it is fundamentally important for SCIAF to work with people of all or no faith.

SCIAF employs 46 people most of whom are in Glasgow though we have recently opened an office in southern Sudan where, in fact, I wrote this paper. Our income was a little less than £6 million in 2007 the bulk of it coming from the Catholic community in Scotland but by no means all of it. As Scotland's largest indigenous aid agency, we have an obligation to be open to, and available for, the wider Scottish community be they Catholic or not. That sense of being both *Scottish* and *Catholic* is intrinsic to the understanding of our mission.

SCIAF's vision and mission

Our mission statement is:

Inspired by the Gospel call to build a just world, SCIAF challenges injustice by strengthening poor and oppressed people and by stimulating the Scottish public to share in our common struggle for human dignity.

It firmly locates our work within the Church's social teaching. As Cardinal Martino, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, remarked recently at the Synod on the Word of God:

Faith which springs from the Word of God must establish, as is clearly seen in the first chapters of the *Compendium of Social Doctrine*, the ever-present and indispensable horizon of social doctrine. ... It must be remembered that the study of Sacred Scripture and that of social doctrine – though they use different conceptual and methodological instruments – nevertheless represent knowledge 'in faith'. ... In Sacred Scripture it is possible to discover the guiding principles of social doctrine, such as the preferential option for the poor, the commitment to the promotion of justice, and the principle of the universal destination of goods, which are clearly of biblical derivation.¹

In short, we are in name, practice and inspiration a Catholic aid agency in the best traditions of that word.

Organizational context

Over the last decade, much has changed in both the internal and external environment in which we work. Internally we have grown in income and numbers of staff. We have become a more differentiated organization requiring more specialist skills. We employ people of many and no faiths.

Externally, we face a declining Mass-going population, and at the same time increased competition from other organizations for donations from this decreasing pool of donors. Donors, both individual and institutional, want to know what difference their money is making. 'Impact measurement' and 'added-value' are phrases which proliferate in our discourse with them. Our donors know (and so do we) that they have choices about which organization to support. Institutional donors, in particular, demand hard evidence of aid effectiveness. Meeting these externally driven demands of competition and accountability are key challenges for us.

In addition, government wants to engage with us. Some years ago, I was asked to advise the present government on its development awareness strategy. Prior to the G8 meeting in Gleneagles in 2005, leaders of many faith-based organizations (FBOs) were regularly invited to Downing Street for consultations. Government also knows that FBOs can mobilise tens of thousands of committed and motivated supporters.

These experiences, challenges and tensions provide the context and the reasons for what I have to say in this paper.

Global context

No description of the environment within which SCIAF operates would be complete without reference to the far more significant and urgent global context.

There are 1.2 billion people in our world living on less than \$1 a day. At a time of rising global food prices, an additional 75 million people fell below the hunger threshold in 2007 bringing the total number of hungry people in our world to over 900 million. In the developing world, nearly 30,000 children die every day from poverty. This appalling statistic sits alongside the fact that there is an epidemic of obesity in the rich world that is also reducing life expectancy.

The politicians' response to global poverty is half-hearted and dilatory. In 2005, the G8 agreed to provide \$50 billion of aid to help poor countries reduce their poverty. Between 2006 and 2007, global aid flows fell by 8.4%. By contrast, the response to the crisis in global capitalism has been urgent and fulsome. Just one of the G8 countries, the UK, found £37 billion (roughly \$50 billion) in October 2008 to bailout three banks. The numbers are staggering. One investment fund manager confided in me recently that even she cannot comprehend the size of the sums being pumped in to our economy. Amidst the condemnation by politicians and the media of the obscene pay-offs and pensions being paid to failed bankers, there is a deafening silence about the impact of the global recession on the poor. The World Bank estimates that an additional 53 million people will fall below the poverty line because of the recession.

These are the kind of issues with which agencies like SCIAF need to engage if we are to achieve our mission. It takes us directly into the secular world where the language, values and practices associated with faith are sometimes unknown or alien. This poses real challenges for how FBOs operate and seek to express our values and work.

Three areas to be explored in this paper

First, FBOs need to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders both within and beyond their faith community. SCIAF raises funds from Catholics and non-Catholics alike. We work alongside Catholic and non-Catholic partners in the developing world. We are accountable both to the Scottish hierarchy and to regulatory agencies alike. In achieving this, we need to be bilingual. We need,

¹ Quoted from the Vatican Information Service News, 13 October 2008.

of course, a faith-based language. But we also require a secular, sometimes technical language for communicating with our many partners and stakeholders. Indeed it may properly be argued that we need a third language which enables us to communicate and engage with people from other faiths. The challenge is to be multi-lingual without losing the character or language of our faith.

Second, there exist quite different understandings of the work of aid agencies among statutory funders and some within the Church. This can give rise to confusion and even antipathy towards our work. Outside the Church, it reflects a lack of understanding about the holistic, integrated approach FBOs have towards development. Within the Church, this confusion is, I believe, a reflection of the continuing challenge of implementing the full vision of the Second Vatican Council.

Third, there is a compelling need for the work of FBOs to be under-pinned by a robust spirituality of justice if we are to be confident that the ends for which we work and the means by which we achieve these ends are truly those of God. Yet the resources for nurturing and strengthening this spirituality are patchy. They are certainly far less comprehensive than, for example, the resources available to agencies about technical tools like logical frameworks.

Multilingualism

All FBOs operate in both a religious and a secular milieu. Most retain the support of the particular faith community which set them up. As organizations grow and develop, some distance can emerge between the original intentions of the founding community and the increasingly professional practices of its executive staff. This is also true in secular organizations.

It becomes a problem for FBOs when the motivation of the staff sometimes appears to be more professional than prophetic. It is further exacerbated by an inevitable tendency for staff to use a technical language to describe their work. A funding application becomes a log frame. Fundraising becomes a marketing strategy. Accounting regulations introduce alien concepts beyond simple cash in and out.

This apparent dichotomy generally provokes more a fear of commercialization than a fear of professionalization. I have heard it described in one organization as the 'two cultures'. One culture existed within the regional offices staffed by people, often ordained, who retained close links to local church congregations. The other culture was the head office populated by people recruited for specific skills and experiences and not necessarily for their faith commitment. In another organization, this dichotomy was often portrayed as a struggle between 'amateurs' and 'professionals' in which professionalism was regarded as suspect.

SCIAF relates closely to the Catholic community in Scotland. We work in all Scotland's Catholic parishes and schools promoting a vision of development inspired by the Church's teaching. However, we know that Mass attendance is, at best, stagnant and since a large measure of our support, both financially and for our campaigns, comes from Catholics who attend Mass, we clearly need to diversify our supporter base.

In particular, we want to engage with the two-thirds of Catholics who do not attend Mass regularly but who have had contact with SCIAF in their early years. We won't reach these people in Church so we need to communicate with them through different media including newspapers and direct mail. Neither can our message to them be the same as it might be to a Mass-going Catholic. For example, when talking to a parish community about a response to an emergency, SCIAF might speak of the parable of the Good Samaritan or the love of neighbour being equal to the love of God. For an audience in a secular setting, we might want, as a small agency, to emphasize our presence within global networks and our ability to deliver a swift, effective response.

We also engage with the UK and Scottish governments. We know that changes to the policies which affect poor people can only come about through this engagement. We believe that the experience of our partners is vitally important in ensuring that government policies are pro-poor people. Too many decisions affecting poor people are taken without reference to them or to their lived experience. This not only results in a missed opportunity but also wasted resources. Policy and practice must co-exist. In Southern Sudan, for example, representatives of the European Union have asked SCIAF to feed back to them on the impact of changes made by the government of south Sudan to the education system in order to ensure they are benefiting local communities.

Many FBOs work in an increasingly collaborative way with organizations from across civil society. This is an effective way of sharing information and experience and of leveraging our support when advocating to governments. SCIAF plays a leading role in a number of international faith networks (like the Brussels based CIDSE or Vatican based Caritas) and home based, secular networks (such as Make Poverty History or the Fairtrade Forum). FBOs and their secular counter-parts share much in common. There are also areas which, on occasion, divide us. Compromise and negotiation are inevitable.

The challenges associated with being professional, of growing our supporter base outside our traditional constituency and of collaborating with secular agencies require a flexible, multilingual approach. To some, this can appear as though SCIAF is diminishing the faith values in its work, seeking to appeal to the lowest common denominator just so that we can raise money or attract support.

I was asked recently by a journalist how I would answer allegations by Catholics that ‘SCIAF is ashamed of its Catholic origins and ministry’. He further asked how I would answer the allegation that ‘SCIAF is more humanitarian than spiritual’. He was prompted to ask these questions, first, because we no longer spell out the acronym SCIAF in our publications. Second, because we associated ourselves with a report from Amnesty International about sexual violence against women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The latter was controversial because some Scottish Bishops cancelled their membership of Amnesty following its recent stance on abortion. Guilt by association, in other words.

Even more recently, concerns have been raised about the participation of Catholic schools in Comic Relief’s Red Nose Day. They cite the (entirely erroneous) perception that monies raised go to fund abortions. Despite Comic Relief being open about its funding practices and the Church hierarchy receiving reassurance, the unfair criticism persists even to the point of saying Catholic agencies should not accept funding from Comic Relief which assists thousands of vulnerable young people in Uganda.

There is undoubtedly a risk that, unless faith-based agencies explicitly articulate the faith dimensions of their work, the inspiration and motivation will diminish and may even disappear. This is especially true when the workforce is religiously diverse.

The Jesuit Refugee Service argues that, without the Ignatian vision of its work with refugees:

...the work of JRS may well decline into a routine which barely differs from political administration. People will volunteer for it who want to belong to a well-run organization with admirable aims ... something more is needed beyond well-organized efficiency.²

On the other hand, there is a risk that in articulating our work to others, it is heard in a quite different way from that which is intended. For example, it may create a perception that a FBO works only with people from its own faith community or that it is concerned with proselytising. For SCIAF, such a perception would be at odds with our understanding of authentic development which ‘... must be based on the love of God and neighbour, and must help to promote the relationships between individuals and society’.³ It might also undermine the credibility of our work in many countries and, most worryingly, create physical danger for those implementing it.

The tragic death in Afghanistan on 20 October 2008 of the Christian missionary, Gayle Williams, illustrates this point. Taliban sources were quoted as

saying that she was killed ‘because she was spreading Christianity’.⁴ This has been strongly denied by her organization and whatever the truth or otherwise of the situation, it was a despicable act which shows the danger to which many aid workers are exposed.

Ms Williams’s death led to a perplexing comment. Writing in the same edition of *The Times*, Catherine Philp and Michael Evans said of the aid agency Christian Aid: ‘Christian Aid is a strictly secular agency dedicated to poverty eradication.’⁵ For an organization sponsored by more than forty Churches and which describes itself as ‘self-evidently, a Christian organization’, this is a counter-intuitive statement and suggests a lack of understanding about what a specifically Christian faith based organization is.

The need to be multilingual is not necessarily a threat to the ethos of a FBO. After all, there are many people who have learnt to speak two or more languages fluently. In most cases, one language is the dominant. In the same way, the dominant language in a FBO is likely to be the faith language. For reasons that I have outlined, there is a need to be judicious about the use of all languages. And while language is important, perhaps more important is the very presence of a FBO in a situation of extreme need. This speaks more loudly than any words. The lately retired General of the Society of Jesus, Father Hans Peter Kolvenbach, wrote of Jesuit Refugee Service:

The presence of JRS among refugees is one of breaking bread together, of sharing and community... It is also partnership; the mission of JRS is implemented not for but with refugees ...⁶

SCIAF’s motivation, albeit expressed slightly differently, is the same. SCIAF does not implement development programmes itself. We prefer to work through local implementing organizations. While this may reduce the direct control we have over the services provided to local people, in the long run, it enhances the likelihood that the interventions will be last. Aid dependence on external parties is a real and ever-present danger in development. It is the complete antithesis of what good development ought to be about.

2 Alonso, P. et al, *God in Exile: Towards a shared spirituality with refugees*. Roma Prati: Jesuit Refugee Service, 2005, p. 123.

3 Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis: On Social Concern* (1987), in O’Brien, D.J., and Shannon, T.A. (eds), *Catholic Social Thought. The Documentary Heritage*. New York: Orbis Books, 2000, pp. 393–436, § 33.

4 Quoted in *The Times*, 21 October 2008.

5 Ibid.

6 Kolvenbach, P.H., ‘Introduction’, *God in Exile*, p. 11.

The development process requires patience, time (often lots of it) and a deep understanding of who poor people are. It is precisely our willingness to engage with people on their terms and to spend time with them which makes FBOs different. Our motivation is not driven by ideology or politics but by a belief in the God-given dignity which each and every person has. It is simultaneously shocking and life-affirming to enter a leper colony in Southern Sudan, a refugee camp in Darfur or a prison in Rwanda housing tens of thousands of *genocidaires* and remind oneself that these people are created in the image and likeness of God.

‘Partnership’ is vital to SCIAF’s work. Our relationship with our partners is, and should be, one predicated on a Christian understanding of solidarity; a sense that what we do, we do together and that we share equally success and failure. It would be disingenuous to claim that the relationship between a funding agency and its partners is always and everywhere equal. The existence of a financial relationship, in which one party has funds and the other needs them, inevitably distorts that equality. However, neither is it the kind of contractual relationship which has become so commonplace in care services in the UK.

SCIAF speaks of ‘accompaniment’ in a literal and figurative sense. We choose to accompany partners for many years, walking with them as they respond to the needs of local communities. In a theological sense, we also break bread with them through this partnership. A technical consultant recently working with SCIAF was completely nonplussed by the idea of SCIAF *accompanying* its partners in the theological sense which Kolvenbach means. This is a language which distinguishes many FBOs from their secular counter-parts. Our sharing of resources with our partners, whether financial or competence based, our willingness to advocate with or for them, mirrors the early Christian community:

The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. They went as a body to the Temple each day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread ... Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved. (Acts 2:44–47)

Charity or justice?

In his Apostolic letter for the Millennium, Pope John Paul II encouraged Christians ‘to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world ...’⁷ In a myriad of countries, the Church has done precisely this often attracting persecution and, on occasions, martyrdom.

It is commonplace for faith-based development organizations to engage in advocacy on the economic and political causes of poverty. The Church has strongly identified ‘structural sin’⁸ as a major cause of poverty and injustice. For agencies like SCIAF, this has never been more important as we try to give a voice to the voiceless communities with which we work.

In 2005, faith-based agencies led the way in encouraging their supporters to turn out in Edinburgh to join a mass rally prior to the G8 leaders meeting in Gleneagles. In 2007, alongside other agencies, SCIAF released a report on the unjust actions of a British registered mining company in Zambia. Our lobbying and campaigning work resulted in 415 million dollars being released into the Zambian economy for healthcare and education.⁹

This engagement with politics unsettles some in the Church. They prefer to see agencies’ work as charitable and non-political. In practice, all development work touches in some way on a political reality. For example, working with the Dalit community in India at any level is a political act. In countries where a repressive regime exists, the choice of partners is always a highly significant one.

In his first Encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict says:

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.¹⁰

Pope Benedict’s recognition that any work for justice will be a fight is reassuring if a little ambivalent. Is a bishop or Church worker or aid agency which takes on a force of injustice on behalf of a community really acting inappropriately?

When, as President of CIDSE, I led a delegation of cardinals and bishops to meet with G8 leaders in 2007, the dynamic between the prelates and politicians was revealing. The bishops were understandably uncomfortable talking about detailed policy issues whereas the Ministers were delighted. But when the bishops focused on the moral arguments for change, the politicians were deeply discomfited. Indeed it prompted one G8 Finance Minister, after a pleasingly robust exchange, to remark that the commitments to reduce poverty may be politically expedient and morally proper, but they were not legally enforceable.

7 Pope John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 1994, §51.

8 Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis: On Social Concern* (1987), §§ 35–38.

9 SCIAF, ACTSA, Christian Aid, *Undermining Development? Copper mining in Zambia*, 2007.

10 Pope Benedict XIV, *Deus caritas est*, 2006, §28.

Few, if any, people have either the access or the credibility to political leaders that the Church has. The bishops were able to speak with great authority because of the work of diocesan and national development agencies on the ground. This advocacy is truly an example of Words in Action. If agencies are to be true to their mission, genuine about making a difference and faithful to the Jesus we see in the gospel, it is surely their duty to take up this struggle against those whose actions would harm the poor. It is in this context that the need for there to be a solid spirituality underpinning the work of a FBO becomes vital.

Nurturing the spirit for justice

The values that underpin SCIAF's work are absolutely those of the Jesus who, as a young man in his late twenties, returns to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth and delivers a homily as part of the usual Sabbath synagogue service:

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
For he has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And sight to the blind,
To set the downtrodden free,
to proclaim the Lord's year of favour (Luke 4: 18–19).

The Dutch Jesuit, Paul Caspersz, working in Sri Lanka has written:

The Spirit of the Lord which invades him leads him inexorably to seek to bring liberation to the poor. In order to sustain him in his mission, he is given the gift of the power-filled Spirit of Truth and Justice. The socio-political situation of the people of Palestine at the time Jesus spoke at Nazareth ... makes it impossible for Jesus to use his heavily loaded language about freedom and expect it to be understood in an other-worldly sense of spiritual liberation only.¹¹

It is probably true for many people engaged in work for social justice that they can sometimes underplay the spirituality required to bring it about. As people of faith, it is easy to mistake our practical work for justice as a sufficient act of spirituality in and of itself. Someone once warned of the dangers of becoming so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. Those are wise words. But I also think we can be come so earthly focused that we forget the transcendent destination we search for.

It is certainly my experience that unless our work for justice is underpinned by prayer, we tend towards a final destination that is of our creation rather than God's. I know of one FBO which requires (yes, it is contractual) all staff to attend a weekly prayer meeting. Another, by contrast, has forbidden staff to begin meetings with a prayer because it is felt to be inappropriate in a professional setting.

However, I warm to Cardinal Newman's admonition written in 1875, that 'the Church has two sides, a human and divine, and that everything that is human is liable to error.'¹² To quote Paul Caspersz again:

The fire for justice with which one is consumed makes it impossible for the Christian not to have the desire that that fire be kindled all over the earth. There is only one proviso. The passion for justice must spring from the life of faith. It must be constantly nourished by the spirit of God. For what is faith but a commitment to God who appears to us in Jesus and calls us to work for the liberation of his people?¹³

I was recently invited to join a virtual network of social activists and justice workers who are looking for ways of strengthening their spirituality. One of them wrote to me as follows:

In my experience a lot of people become engaged in justice areas as an outcome of faith yet find it difficult to find ways to support it once they are involved. Justice spirituality seems to become acting for justice itself rather than something that emerges from the engagement between faith and action and so many people end up becoming burnt out or frustrated that the Church doesn't seem to offer anything that links the liturgy they experience in church with their work for justice.

Picking up this last point about liturgy, Gerry W. Hughes SJ has recently written the following:

11 Caspersz SJ, P., 'The Future of Liberation Theology if it has one.' Unpublished paper, October 1996.

12 Letter to John Rickards Mozley quoted on www.newmanreader.org Also available in *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. 27.

13 Caspersz, 'The Future of Liberation Theology if it has one.'

The theology of the Eucharist as it has been commonly communicated to laity and to clergy places such emphasis on the sign of the Eucharist, the consecrated bread and wine, that far from deepening our understanding of the true Presence, it diminishes its importance and limits its meaning.¹⁴

Hughes goes on to say:

[R]evitalizing the celebration of Mass in all our communities is necessary and desirable. What I find missing in all these statements is any mention of the deeper significance of the sacrament, an indication of the connection between our celebration of the Eucharist and world hunger ... Where are the thundering voices of the prophet Amos, of Isaiah, denouncing all those liturgies celebrated without regard to the oppression which oppresses and kills the poor and the powerless?

My point here is that the relatively few resources which can nurture, guide, challenge and ultimately support the prayer of people working for justice reflects a wider disjunction between Spirit and action. The Jesus that Paul Caspersz describes is inflamed with a desire to bring good news to the poor and captives because of his spirituality. Hughes laments the loss of meaning in the celebration of the Eucharist between the sign and its wider significance. Where are the contemporary voices of prophecy, he asks.

Conclusion

If faith-based organizations have been slow to articulate the religious rationale for their work, if they have sacrificed prophecy for professionalism, and if their personal relationship with God appears to be diminished, it is perhaps incomplete to explain this only by reference to the advance of secularism. Perhaps there is a wider ecclesial challenge in communicating the consequences and costs, as Cardinal Martino put it, of the 'faith which springs from the Word of God' in a language that is easily understood and in presenting it in a way that is widely accessible to the greatest number of people. Perhaps the challenge that properly falls to FBOs like SCIAF extends equally to those responsible for our liturgies which all too often seem to lack any sense of connection to life outside the walls of our churches.

Writing in 1971, Pope Paul VI issued the kind of thundering, prophetic challenge which is needed today:

It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action ... The Christian's hope comes primarily from the fact that he knows that the Lord is working with us in the world, continuing in his Body which is the Church – and, through the Church, in the whole of mankind ... This hope springs also from the fact that the Christian knows that others are at work, to undertake actions of justice and peace working for the same ends. For beneath an outward appearance of indifference, in the heart of every person there is a will to live in brotherhood and a thirst for justice and peace, which is to be expanded.¹⁵

Truly these are words which demand action!

¹⁴ Hughes SJ, G.W., 'Neglecting the Real Eucharistic Presence?' *The Pastoral Review* 4.5 (2008).

¹⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima adveniens: A Call to Action on the Eightieth Anniversary of Rerum novarum* (1971), in O'Brien, D.J., and Shannon, T.A. (eds), *Catholic Social Thought. The Documentary Heritage*. New York: Orbis Books, 2000, pp. 263–86, § 48.

SAYYED NADEEM KAZMI
SHAYKH MUHAMMAD AMIN-EVANS

SET IN CONCRETE

MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN
ENCOUNTERS OVER WORDS

**SET IN CONCRETE:
MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTERS OVER WORDS**

Sayyed Nadeem KAZMI and Shaykh Muhammad AMIN-EVANS

Sayyed Nadeem Kazmi is the founder and director of The Britslam Partnership, an innovative non-profit consultancy catalyzing change through multi-level engagement processes. Its projects include a major community cohesion initiative, launched in September 2007 as MCDN (Muslim Communities Development Network). He has been an adviser to Prince Hasan bin Talal of Jordan, The Elijah Academy Board of World Religious Leaders, American Islamic Congress, Rights and Humanity, and Justitia et Pax.

Muhammad Amin-Evans is the Consulting Editor of Shia Affairs and holds the degrees of Sultan al-Fadh wal-Islamiyya wal-Arabiyya, an MA in Islamic Studies from the Al-Mahdi Institute. He has taught Fiqh, Methodology and the Comparative Study of Religions. He currently serves on the executive committee of the West Midlands Faiths Forum, is a member of the World Congress of Faiths, Birmingham Council of Faiths, gives moral support to the International Association for Religious Freedom and was formerly a trustee of the Roger Hooker Trust.

This paper began as a reflection presented by S.N. Kazmi upon faith-based motivation in strengthening our capacities as faith-based organizations and individuals, drawing some inspiration from the words he often heard from H.R.H. Prince Hasan of Jordan, 'I consider myself to be a non-governmental organism before I am a non-governmental organization.' Mr. Kazmi asked

how do we resist being reduced by state agencies, and indeed the State, to a common mixture when we think we function as elements? This current paper looks broadly at the achievements of faith-based organizations while drawing attention to anomalies within inter-faith encounters that it is suggested may have impact upon the greater effectiveness and consolidation of the role that faith-based organizations have successfully assumed.

Our objections to being reduced by state agencies may not be wholly their problem. We, as faith or religion-based entities have to consider what we contribute to the process of reduction. The attitude of governmental agencies may be a response to our words and actions, and it may be, we are criticising the splinter in their eyes when it is essentially a reflection of the plank in ours. In representing ourselves with united voice we might give the impression of being incorporated but the unity and co-operation between faith-based organizations cannot be a conceptually contractual relationship which binds its parties into an inseparable whole. Organizations which have as a fundamental tenet the right to act according to their perception of morality cannot limit themselves with imprecise and open ended agreements. For instance, a simple statement of a collective belief in marriage has different meanings to Christians, Muslims and (some¹) Hindus which would allow them to declare *ex turpi causa non oritur actio*.² Yet, faith-organizations can support their own perceived rights and each others' rights within a voluntary, inclusive moral covenant with many of the features described by Professor Gorsky elsewhere in this series.³ For Muslims as well as in Islamic terminology this might be considered under the heading of *mithāq*,⁴ a promise made by a believer in the knowledge that its fulfilment is a religious duty.⁵

It is right, moral and necessary that faith communities strive to jointly address the issue of how we talk to Government. It is also right and beneficial that faith communities make efforts to speak with a shared voice when responding to challenges that are common to all of us. In this exercise an inclusive net has to be cast as far and wide as possible or at least as wide as the remit claimed by government and governmental agencies. The need and willingness to speak with a united and inclusive voice may invite a reductionist view of faith communities but only if those communities allow the characteristics of their own beliefs to be side lined. Language is a key consideration in negotiating one's position as a non-state actor with state actors and in defining the nature of the non-state negotiator. The case of the social and political assertiveness of Muslim communities, particularly post-Rushdie, cannot be denied and can positively and constructively inform the inter-faith agenda. Events that like the Sikh protest at the staging of the play 'Behzti',⁶ while raising questions to the limits of legitimate expression of religious feelings, offer the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of inter-religious dialogue when it is placed under an external pressure.

The late Canon Roger Hooker is remembered with great fondness as the inter-faith advisor to the Anglican Bishop of Birmingham, who regularly visited Amin-Evans at the Al-Mahdi Institute in Birmingham to drink tea and discuss faith in the city. While on one of his many visits, and drinking his second mug of tea he said without preamble, ‘You know, Amin, I love tea but what I really love is a chap who believes his faith is right and is ready to fight tooth and nail for his corner.’ Roger had summed up his own dilemma and his vision of inter-faith dialogue. He was committed to the Anglican Church, an evangelical and former missionary to India. Yet, he was equally committed to understanding the realities perceived by followers of other faiths and ensuring they had the opportunity and means to express their belief. It may be that he was from a time when playing cricket and fighting fair had more meaning but everyone who met Roger knew that his discourse was not just words. Differences were real things to him that needed to be dealt with and not simply avoided or ignored.

Returning the question of reductionism, how do faith communities resist being reduced to some common convenient element, we have to get our own house in order first and that involves a reassessment of where we are in terms of our inter-faith dialogue. We are quite hopeful because inter-faith dialogue is at a very sophisticated level of community interaction and community interconnectedness. We now know more about one another than we have ever done before because we are communities and generations that have grown – and are growing up with knowledge and experience and understanding of the ‘other’. But there are internal challenges, the clashes within civilizations (to borrow Huntington’s clash of civilizations model), that need to be addressed by communities of faith themselves.

‘Words in Action’ is an intriguing title for all students of religions but especially for those students who are Muslim or of other faith identities that consider words to have a spiritual value in their physical forms. We are all aware that for many faiths the touching of particular religious texts is forbidden or only permitted if the person touching the text has acquired a requisite state of purity. However, the effect of these restrictions upon practical issues for

- 1 http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/man-marries-two-sisters-and-the-three-are-happy_10098644.html
- 2 No action can be based upon a disreputable cause.
- 3 Gorsky, J., ‘Radical Covenant: Jews, Christians and the Politics of Neo-Liberalism’, *Words in Action: Speaking in Our Own Words*. The Institute Series 10, 2008.
- 4 Q. 23:8 and 23:20.
- 5 Biazar, A. al-K. (1356 SH) *The Covenant in The Qur’an*, Tehran, Office for Diffusion of Islamic Culture, pp. 10–11 and 65–66.
- 6 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/west_midlands/4107437.stm

inter-faith dialogue seem to have been assigned to the file marked 'tolerance' rather than being explored as phenomena important to developing mutual understanding.

The following anecdotes are intended as examples of types of anomalies that occur within the context of the encounter of faith-cultures. We have described them as anecdotes since they were not recorded according to any particular methodology and are simply a selection of the authors' observations in relation to the practical use of words.

Anecdote one

When one of the authors entered Coventry Cathedral for the first time with a Muslim friend they faced the problem of crossing a floor inset with biblical verses. There followed a spectacle that resembled the combination of a challenge from a *dungeons and dragons* movie and a beginners' course of Caribbean dancing as they attempted to walk through the letters rather than upon them. The author paused with one foot in the air while considering whether the space in the letter 'O' is just a space or part of the letter and his friend said, 'It's so easy for them!' People who simply walked past with ease cast disapproving glances at what must have appeared to them to be a most disrespectful game. Yet the two Muslims were driven to act by serious emotional and theological obstacles created not by what the words said but who might have said them. A Muslim scholar, to whom the story was told pulled a horrified face at the description of Holy text set in a floor, laughed at a re-enactment of the dance routine and asked whether the text in question was revealed text or an addition to the original. However, it was agreed that in terms of respect, rather than if a sin might be committed, the precaution is to treat all text in Holy books as revealed. The Qur'an is explicit concerning what a believer must think about revealed texts, 'And who believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter' (Q. 2:4). Therefore the way Muslims approach and handle primary religious texts is an act of worship informed by the customary treatment and protection of the Qur'an.

The emotional responses to threats to a copy of the Qur'an are well known and publicised. In fact, the response even to accidental damage can reveal a dark side to words in action. Imagine then the feelings of a Muslim telling a Christian clergyman at an inter-faith gathering about the consequences of entering Coventry Cathedral and receiving the reply, 'We have to get over these little things.' Which is the 'little' thing, the Bible or Muslim sensibilities? What is the integrity of dialogue if it ignores the emotional knowledge of religion, awareness of which is fundamental to the empathic experience of other faiths?

Crucial to this discussion is the observation that what is said about our own confession may be treated as words not worthy of action. Of course, in expecting action there was no thought that the cathedral floor might be excavated or have a bridge constructed over it. The action desired was recognition of difference and not the implicit response that ‘if it’s not a problem for us then it’s no problem for you.’ However, it might be thought that this is an isolated incident but in the day to day function of inter-faith encounter it is often repeated.

Anecdote two

During a seminar for evangelical Christians Farid Essack studiously moved a pile of books to one end of a table before perching at the other end. He asked the participants if they had ever considered how offensive it was for Muslims to see them sitting on books, placing Bibles on the floor or even taking books into a toilet. One young man caused some merriment when he stood and picked up the Bible he had been sitting on but Farid emphasised his point that if the written word is perceived to be disrespected then the spoken word is likely to be less respected.

Is this just the product of Muslim sensitivity or is there an issue of substance that affects the relationship between religions? It may be suggested that what is observed is not carelessness towards the sensitivities of other faiths or habit but an expression of what Smart described as an asymmetry in the study of religions.⁷ Many emotive issues do not hold prominent positions in the categories of theological thought and this is a case where the normative behaviour of the majority partner is designated as ‘right’ unless it is directly questioned.

Anecdote three and three A

The language used for the study of religions and derivatively for discussions of inter-faith issues is the product of largely Christian academic writing. In other contexts the terminology can be problematic. When reading an unpublished paper, written by a Muslim academic, a Muslim reader understood the writer to think that the Shi’a are Christians because of the phrase, ‘The Shi’ite church and clergy.’ In that case the problem was easily rectified but, consider the conversation between a vicar and a Muslim alim (scholar) on the topic of God’s Mercy and their realization that they had both assumed that they both understood the term with identical meaning but actually held two extremely different concepts of its application.

7 Smart, N., *Concept and Empathy*. New York: New York University Press, 1986, pp. 207–219.

Anecdote four

A few days after a party of Christian students from the former East Germany had visited a Mosque in the UK, one of the visitors contacted their Muslim host to ask 'Is it true that the word love does not appear in the Qur'an?' While inside the Mosque they had been told that the absence of the word love was proof that Muslims worship a different God by the inter-faith advisor to one of the major Christian denominations who also represented Churches Together as an executive member of an important inter-faith committee. It is the Arabic word *'Ishq* that does not appear in the Qur'an but *ḥubb* and *wud* appear frequently and all three words mean love.

A complaint to CT met with prevarication. A complaint to his Church met more prevarication and the objection that to suggest he had been less than truthful was being ungenerous. However, while one does not expect an open admission of error from a Church, Christian or Muslim, it was the reaction of the inter-faith organization that was most disappointing. They chose to describe the issue as a 'personal problem between two of their members' and offered mediation. The offer was declined.

The joint apocrypha and beyond

Inter-faith encounters replete with genuine misunderstandings are further hampered by the activities of overly enthusiastic proselytes. 'Muslim' groups practicing daw'ah, calling 'unbelievers' to Islam promote absurd and unlikely meanings for Biblical verses. 'Christian' writers pour forth an equally absurd and equally literal barrage of pamphlets and paperbacks proclaiming 'What the Quran Really Says!' While it has a provenance stretching back in time to the earliest polemical encounters of Islam with Christianity it is essentially a deplorable hindrance to the discussion and understanding of valid differences between religions. Worse still the champions of our faiths educated by such literature flood websites and email inboxes with questions concerning the need of the 'Christian God to sleep' or the Muslim belief that 'the Sun sets in a muddy puddle'.⁸ Subjected to the comedic mind of Radio Four's Dennis Nordern's (feigned) belief in literalism was very amusing but jokes wear thin with repetition.

While we can rely upon broadcasting organizations to occasionally discipline their comedians, in the world of inter-faith encounter there is often little attempt to address or regulate what happens other than a reliance upon self-discipline. We sit on fences until the problem seems to disappear. Muslims and Christians, for example, have long been affected by terrorism in a number of

different ways – as victims, as perpetrators, as bystanders. Surely one of the first steps towards greater security for all is to ensure that we act against falsehood but it seems to have a low place on the common agenda. In Islam we know that these ideologues are far removed from not only the mainstream but perhaps even the traditionalist views of Muslims (not to mention the views of Muslim secularists, Muslim democrats, and all those Muslims who simply hate any type of definition or pigeonholing). Take former President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sayyed Muhammad Khatami, for instance, perhaps a traditionalist (certainly one open to reformist ideas) who warned of the ‘parochial and regressive visions’ of ‘dogmatic believers’ who are leaving ‘a clear void in religious intellectualism.’ So the clash in Islam is between the forces of pluralism and the forces of extremism, not necessarily traditionalists but often individuals with extreme views and tendencies built almost exclusively around an interpretation of religious scripture that is so puritanical as to be unrecognizable to most ‘ordinary’ believers. This is also the clash between the forces of separatism and those of cohesion and is a dichotomy that could have far-reaching repercussions in our own negotiations with one another as people of faith.

The business of modern inter-faith encounter appears to resolve questions of difference and antagonism between faiths. However, is this resolution apparent or real? Is it due to action or inaction or a lack of awareness? The real resolution of religious misunderstandings, where it exists, we believe needs no other proof than the genuine friendships that develop between members of different faiths in assemblies such as the one to which we present this paper. The significant and positive effect of inter-faith encounter cannot be denied and this paper is not intended to suggest otherwise. Rather it has drawn attention to anomalies in the implementation of inter-faith encounter methodology. These are the observable and observed awkward moments that cause pauses in the otherwise smooth and constructive process of dialogue. Moments when, to borrow from John Hick,⁹ we apply epicyclic thought to bridge gaps when perhaps we should be praying for a Kepler to appear.

It is the issues introduced above that remain prominent among those unresolved or unexplored that are of concern to realising the potential that inter-faith dialogue offers. Wilfred Cantwell Smith wrote in ‘Conflicting Truth Claims: A Rejoinder’:

8 Q. 18:86

9 Hick, J., *God and the Universe of Faiths*. London, The Macmillan Press, 1973.

[W]hen one of our number (from India) affirmed the transmigration of souls and another (from Europe) denied it, their statements surely conflicted, or at least appeared to conflict, it was urged; so that I seemed both obtuse and obdurate when, in the face of this, I still demurred to the formula.¹⁰

However, thirty-five years later the solution to differences occurring due to inter-faith encounters is to elide. Thus, long before government agencies knock on our door we, the faith communities, have already opened it for reduction. It seems we are, sometimes, more concerned about the embarrassment of being different than dealing with the issue of difference.

So what we are looking for is even greater inclusiveness in our approach to faith communities because, when it comes to talking to government, faith communities are looked up to as beacons of effective dialogue and communication. However, greater inclusivity brings with it the challenge of greater diversity. A challenge which Government balked at and policy moved from multiculturalism to integration which many engaged in inter-faith and intercultural encounters see as a regressive step. However, it is one of a number of areas including community cohesion and foreign policy that faith communities can effect change through dialogue with government agencies.

In relation to foreign policy in particular both US and UK political culture may be led by what Francis Fukuyama has called 'a narrow and cynical realism'. However, what may be needed is a return to a strong idealism but one that is rooted in morality, what Muslims might refer to as *nahī anil munkar wa 'amr bil ma'rūf*¹¹ (enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong). The consideration of morality here introduces, by definition, a reality in one's approach towards action at all levels of faith encounter. The moral man, or woman, is the decisive man, or woman. In this way, as God-fearing subjects that live and breathe and exist in Western political and social environments, we may move away from accusations of trying to impose a peculiarly Western form of liberal democracy on the world whilst paradoxically supporting the very principles of liberal democracy through (1) active political participation, and (2) accentuating pluralism through promoting the moral imperative. Everything about government action thus becomes a question of morals, ethics and, dare it be said, spiritual progressiveness.

10 Smith, W. C., 'Conflicting Truth Claims: A Rejoinder', in *Truth and Dialogue*. Ed J. Hick, London: Sheldon Press, 1974, pp. 156–162.

11 Q. 3:104.

OLIVER DAVIES

THEOLOGY AND AID

SPEAKING ACROSS BOUNDARIES

THEOLOGY AND AID: SPEAKING ACROSS BOUNDARIES

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Theology has to be in conversation. The theology presented here (which goes by the name of Transformation Theology) in particular needs to be in conversation since its very rationale is to point to transformation in the world as being the chief point of focus for theology. In whatever situations people can make a difference therefore, wherever they find that they can make the world *this* world and not another, theology needs to find a form of engagement. Theologians need both to listen to the perspectives of others and to be constructive conversation partners. They need this for themselves, since in incarnation God is laying claim to the world as God's world. But as *incarnation* shows, God is laying claim to the world in its unity, voyaging towards an ultimate future, precisely within the particulars of history. It is never an abstract history; it is always a concrete one. Transformation Theology is perhaps unusual as systematic theology in that it takes engagement with the world in configurations of 'power and powerlessness' (which is where things change and thus where, from a Christian perspective, they can be transformed) as a primary part of doctrine and specifically of Christology as the formal study of the nature and meaning of Christ.¹ Situations of power and powerlessness are thus specifically *within* theology and not something external to it which it needs to address.

Nowhere in the world today (unless it be in the planetary situation of power and powerlessness that is climate change) do we find the power-differential (as we can call the configuration of power and powerlessness within real situations) so vividly projected onto a global stage than in the issue of development and aid. At its core, this is a question of the most basic human need – hunger and thirst, excessive cold and heat – magnified by a factor of millions. The economic and

¹ This is Clemens Sedmak's phrase. There are of course close parallels to this in contemporary theology, in the work of Jürgen Moltmann, for instance, *The Crucified God*. London: SCM Press, 1974; Johann Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World*. New York, London: Herder and Herder, Burns and Oates, 1969; Edward Schillebeeckx, *World and Church*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1971, as well as the work of the Liberation Theologians.

political issues associated with poverty and aid are hugely complex, as is the task of raising financial and political support for aid projects. But in essence the only reason why poverty, aid and development combine in a complex global project is that human beings everywhere are capable of recognising the suffering of the other in their most immediate vicinity when it concerns these most primary forms of need (though not all human beings respond to the same degree, or in the same way, and not all extend that concern to the same extent to the visual image of needy others far away). But the economic and political agenda of aid is as important as it is because we know what it is to be hungry or cold, and we can imagine what it must be like to be caught up in vicious cycles of poverty, causing every kind of deprivation and vulnerability.

Because of the natural capacity of the human individual to feel compassion towards those in our immediate vicinity who are suffering acute need, an engagement with world poverty, development and aid, has to give a place to anthropology, as well as to economics and politics. Without such a compassionate orientation of the self at large within the relatively wealthy populations of the political North, aid would have to appeal to purely pragmatic arguments. Anthropology here means that distinctive form of thinking which asks questions about what it is to be a human being in the first place. The anthropology set out in this paper is presented firstly from a philosophical perspective (and is thus potentially meaningful for everybody) and then from a theological perspective (and so is potentially meaningful primarily for Christians). I shall strive to keep a clear distinction between the two. This anthropology also focuses in particular on what it is to be an actor or agent in the world (or what we shall call act-subjectivity) and what it is to be a knower in the world (knowing-subjectivity). These are the two primary ways in which we are alive in the world: as knower and actor. In particular we shall be concerned with the different roles played by reason and will in these two subjectivities and with the two different ways in which we feel that we are *free* when we act and know respectively. We shall be particularly concerned with the ways in which these two subjectivities interrelate in modern social life. On a clarificatory note, I shall not make much mention of emotion, on the grounds that when we say we 'feel' something about other people or that we 'feel' we need to do something, we are generally talking about *judgements* and thus about what used to be known as 'practical' reason: reasoning that is in the service, or in the midst indeed, of action. Once we have looked at knowing and acting from a philosophical perspective, we shall consider how they relate, with their respective subjectivities, in today's global, technological world, and shall proceed to identify a third subjectivity which is distinctively religious. We will focus here upon its meaning in a Christian framework, and then consider how theology can best support those who are

actively engaged, in the name of Christ, with the 'power-differential' through development and aid. Needless to say, this will require a prior listening to the views of others about the particularity of that situation, which we have now begun, before leading to what will hopefully be a common project of thinking through a theology distinctive to aid.

What is theology?

Let us begin then with a question. If theology is about life, then what exactly is the role of theology in life, given that theology, like philosophy, is a form of *thinking* or reflection? Philosophy is about how we should orientate ourselves to the world of space and time in which we find ourselves as living creatures. Theology differs from philosophy in that it is about orientation to the world in the light of God's incarnation into the world of space and time in Jesus Christ. Many other factors influence how we orientate ourselves to the world (which is to say how we choose to live). What is distinctive about formal philosophy and theology however is that they are concerned with fundamental questions in our orientation to the world and take on an abstracted form which is often transferable, or at least generative, across different cultures and times. The work of the theologian then is to give an account of orientation to the world, of how we should live and why we should live like that, which is thought through from within doctrine, as what is for us the normative expression of a Christian orientation to the world. 'I believe in one God ...' means for the Church that if we believe that, then we shall live in the right way, as disciples.

Creedal doctrine on its own is not enough however. It appears to hang in some neutral zone, outside specific space and time. It is more a statement of fact than salvation-history. It is the work of the theologian to make doctrine 'live', which is to say to allow doctrine to challenge and to shape our orientation to the world of space and time, which is to say to life itself. But in doing this, on their own behalf and on behalf of others, the theologian does not so much create as discover: he or she specifically discovers the meaning of doctrine today. But he or she needs to know where to look and how to be attentive. The theological method which underlies this paper is one of transformation, and it focuses upon the ways in which human beings can change the world, through their own radical freedom, in situations of power and powerlessness. These are specifically situations in which freedom is in play, the freedom of act and decision, and where the world can become *this* world and not another.

What is it to be human?

We cannot say that theology is orientation to the world in which incarnation has happened without also asking the question: what does it mean for us to be orientated to the world? Who is it that orientates themselves to the world through the reflective thinking which is theology? In other words, who is it that can become a disciple? We can usefully begin here by adapting Denys Turner's description of Thomas Aquinas' account of what it is to be human in terms of our nature as 'rational animals'.² This means that – as 'rational' – we are creatures capable of objectifying the world of material causation we perceive around us by identifying objects and their effects and by grasping their actual or potential use for us. At the same time – as 'animals' – we are embodied and live mortal lives within material causation. We are not disembodied. As 'rational animals' then we can both be 'outside' history as someone who understands and observes history, understands and observes the way the world is, and the possible uses it can have for us, and also be 'in' history as an actor, who shapes the world in particular ways. Knowing or understanding the world as observer and shaping the world as agent or actor, combine in the unity of human identity and life. They are extensively related therefore. But they are also very different, and are so in important ways.

Knowing

They are different for instance to the extent that knowing and acting constitute two very different types of subjectivity. When we say 'subjectivity' here, we mean something like 'experience of life'. The former, the subjectivity or awareness of the 'knowing-self', is based on judgement that seeks understanding, which brings a sense of being in control. In the judgements of knowledge, we reason in order to achieve the maximum degree of certainty and thus resolution (we have to find the answer). In knowledge, we seek the certainty of irrefutability (it has to be the right answer). We may narrow the questions until they can be answered with greater certainty, and we will try to give ourselves the time we need to resolve the issues. Knowing is not purely a matter of the intellect however. The will must engage to the extent that we will have to create the conditions within which sustained thought becomes a possibility. Life is unlikely to give us the time and space we require unless we first determine to create it. We shall also have to choose through willing to maintain this time and space when all kinds of distractions present themselves. To this extent we can say that will is involved though only negatively. It is certainly the case that the will should keep out of the act of reasoning itself. We should not allow purely personal motivations or

interests to influence us in our objective intellectual judgements, not if we wish to persuade others, very different from us, of the rightness of our arguments. We cannot then will understanding but we can will the practical circumstances which give us the opportunity to achieve it. It prepares the ground but does not achieve the task.

As a form of subjectivity, knowledge brings the 'knowing-self' a particular sense of freedom. This is a freedom *from* however. By knowing, we become free from ignorance or not understanding. By the irrefutability of knowing, we are free from the endemic uncertainty of human living. By focusing our subjectivity in thought (making thinking uppermost in our 'experience of life'), we find not only that the practice of sustained thinking frees us from the practical demands of everyday life, but that in *thinking*, rather than *doing*, we become free from the responsibility of action. Thought does not in fact of itself change the world. It may change me, and thus what I do and so the world, or, if communicated through the act of speech or writing, it may change others and thus through them the world. But thinking *in itself* can change nothing but my intentions. Thereafter will is required in order to carry them out. In sum, we may find ourselves in a court of law on account of something we have done – even said or written – but we can never find ourselves in a court of law for something we have thought. Thinking carries its own responsibility (to get it right), but this is not the responsibility of action, by which we change the world.

Acting

To act in the world, thus shaping it, has a very different subjectivity from that of knowing. Here judgements lead to risk and responsibility. They lead not to a sense of being in control but rather, paradoxically, to a sense of loss of control, as we commit ourselves to act in fluid situations, with ultimately unpredictable consequences, for others and for ourselves, in the actuality of power. Here it is the will that is uppermost as we seek to achieve our own survival and best interests in the world. Although our will shall hopefully be enlightened self-interest, it is nevertheless by the willing that underlies action that we seek to make the world more congenial for us. Situations of decision are resolved when the will either does or does not achieve its ends. But the judgement which precedes the free and deliberated act shows that reason too is involved here. We do not act blindly. Reason discerns the best way to achieve our goals on the one hand and asks questions about the rightness of our motivation on the other. It is also the

2 Turner, Denys, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 90–107, with references to texts by Thomas.

case that our acts need to be manifestly rational, if we are to be trusted as individuals and thus to succeed in society. Trust demands consistency, especially between one act and another, between what we say we think or believe, which is to say our values, between what we say that we will do, and what we *actually* do. The deed is the measure of our consistency, and thus of our predictability and reliability, or trustworthiness, as individuals.

But in the act, reason functions differently from when we think abstractly. When thought is subordinated to the needs of the act, and of thinking through our actions before deciding upon them, it takes on the characteristics not of speculative thinking, which culminates in the thinking that academics do, but rather of practical thinking (or what Paul Janz calls ‘motivational reasoning’³). Practical reasoning cannot generally establish its own timetable (the development of the situation may not be under our control), nor can it ever get the complete information it requires, or establish the reliability of what it thinks it already knows. But it can refine the questions in the interests of getting greater certainty (e.g. ‘I’ll ask so and so and go by what they say, without seeking the views of anyone else’). The more we do this however, the more we will find that we are failing to take account of the situation in its full complexity, and the less well informed our decision to act will become.

In effect therefore, judgement and decision to act take place not within the resolution which speculative reason seeks and can substantially achieve, but within non-resolution: the non-resolution of reasoning which is inevitably confronted by the dynamic uncertainty and fluid complexity of life.⁴ We can call this the actuality of history. The only resolution we can find in the act itself is the resolution that comes from achieving our goals: it is the short term goals of our enlightened will. It is will – the pursuit of our own reasoned and clear interest – that gives meaning to our acts.

Here then we can see a further contrast and important distinction between these two subjectivities. If the knowing-self grounds the sense of freedom as freedom *from*, then the agent-self knows a different kind of freedom. Since free acts occur in situations in which we can make a difference, which is to say situations of the power-differential, the freedom supported by the subjectivity of action is a freedom *to*: a freedom to shape the world in accordance with our enlightened will. At this point a third subjectivity begins to appear on the horizon, which is a religious subjectivity. It is this that will help us most for the development of a theology of aid. But before we get to that point, we need to consider in a little more detail how knowing and acting determine our own historicity, which is to say the fundamental way in which we exist in space and time.

Freedom and responsibility

The two kinds of subjectivity we have discussed occur naturally in the world. The one reflects how we know and understand the world, the other how we act in the world. These bring us to two different states of freedom: a freedom from and a freedom to. But they are radically different in their relation to history. The former, the freedom of knowing, takes us to a focus outside history. It thus protects us from history. When we are thinking about the world, we are not acting within it. Thought here is a mode of distanciation. In the subjectivity of the act however, reason is no longer ‘outside’ history or the world. It becomes compromised precisely by being ‘within’ history and thus is now located within and constrained by the unpredictable complexities of material causation. We are in the grip of history when, in pursuit of our own ends, we act to shape it. But at the same time, will comes between us and world. In our acting subjectivity, we take the world in accordance with our intentions. It serves our ends and needs; we seek to shape it in our image, in accordance with what we want. Will, as an intentional framework within which we perceive and read the world, is likewise a form of distanciation. The former knowing subjectivity asks ‘what is this?’ while the latter agent subjectivity asks ‘how can I use this thing I understand?’ We are shielded from the world in knowledge by its objectification in terms of knowing and from the world in action by its objectification through intentionality or drawing it under the power of our will. If the former is ultimately about a sense of being in control in the world and the latter about using our power in the world, then in each case the specific form of the subjectivity – whether as knower or actor – serves to separate us off from the world: the former through objectification to knowledge and the latter through objectification to will.

The third possibility is already implicitly present. Let us look at it firstly philosophically, which is to say as it naturally occurs in the world, before addressing it from a theological perspective, in the light of revelation. This third type is the subjectivity which arises when, in the midst of action, the intentionality of our will is overcome by a sense of responsibility or obligation. The mediating terms of this may simply be an extension of our own will and interests, as in the way that parents defend the interests of their own children, for instance. We should not assume that someone who is prepared to go ‘the full length’ for their own son or daughter would so do so for someone else’s son or daughter. This probably counts more as our second subjectivity of enlightened self-interest,

3 See Janz, Paul, *The Command of Grace*. London: T&T Clark, 2009.

4 For this terminology, see Janz, P., in Davies, O., Janz, P., and Sedmak, C., *Transformation Theology*. London: T&T Clark, 2007, pp. 78–86.

than our third. But alternatively, the orientation may be more universalist in character, as in the case of conscience, compassion, and the sense of the right or of justice. We do not need to know the person in our vicinity for whom we feel a spontaneous sense of compassion. In these latter cases, the personal orientation of our will is replaced by an altruistic one: we seek the good of another (compassion⁵) or of others (justice) and we do so precisely not as an extension of our personal interests.

And when we follow the promptings of conscience, compassion and justice, then we find a significant change takes place in the structure of the act. We already know that practical reason cannot find resolution in the act. The risk which comes from incalculability is part of the price we pay for power. But *now too the will cannot find resolution*. It is not a question of what is good for me but of what is good for someone else. The latter is much less easily resolved (I have to judge on their behalf, for instance, and have also to judge whether they are right or wrong in their own estimation of where their real good lies). Here the inherent complexity of life, which in a sense disables reasoning, condemning it to non-resolution, also enters the will, condemning it too to non-resolution. With the disabling, or relative disabling of both reason and will, in their natural mode of functioning, under the influence of a felt responsibility for the other or for others, our 'third subjectivity' begins to take shape.

We can see for instance that it builds upon the first two in interesting ways. Our first subjectivity was that of the knowing-subject (the university professor, the thinker), in which will plays only a supporting role, and reason – in search of certainty and ultimately of control – exercises the primary one. Our second subjectivity was that of the agent-subject (the politician, the doer), in which will – in search of our own enlightened interests – now plays the primary role, and reason, for its part, struggles in the openness of non-resolution in the face of the complexity of life and the ultimate uncontrollability of fluid situations. Now in our 'third subjectivity', *both* reason and will are brought to their limit in the face of an engagement with life, for the sake of the other, which exhausts their capacities. Neither can find resolution and yet still we must act, in a free and deliberated way. And we must do so since we find ourselves in a situation in which *not* to act, which is to say not to come to a free and deliberated decision for which we shall be responsible (even if that decision is to refrain from doing anything at all), would feel to be wrong. The kinds of situation we have in mind here are ones in which responsibility towards the other, mediated by natural conscience, compassion and sense of justice, overtake our reasoning and willing. These do not cease to function, in fact both may well be exercised to a very high degree as we struggle to assess the best thing to do and our will is exercised to keep us true to what we perceive to be our responsibility (not to 'walk away',

in other words). But under the weight of responsibility, neither is allowed to function towards resolution, which is their natural end or orientation as knowing and willing individuals struggling to survive in a world that we need both to understand and to use. It is within such radical openness of non-resolution therefore that we come to the finality or closure of decision to act.

History and the act

We have taken the first subjectivity, which is that of knowing and understanding the world, as being a way of living ‘outside’ history, as an observer in fact. A fundamental part of that being ‘outside’ history is that as an observer we *objectify* the world. By knowing it, we know that we are not that which we know. We need to have distance from what we know, or observe, if we are to see it properly, in all its dimensions. This distance is a way of being ‘outside’ history and the world. It is a way in which we can locate the centre of consciousness outside material causation. It is this that grounds this first subjectivity as giving a ‘freedom from’. In the case of our second subjectivity, which is the subjectivity of acting, we find that we are living ‘inside’ history, since now we ourselves shape the world. The centre of our consciousness is now located within history and the causal flow, giving a ‘freedom to’. But still in this subjectivity, we are being distanced from the world. This is not the case now through our knowing, since we precisely do not know in a controlling way when we act, in the face of the complexity of life. There we have to come to decision without the consolation or certainty of knowing which comes to us in our first subjectivity. And yet still there is something that distances us from the world, and from the history in which we nevertheless experience a ‘freedom to’. This new distancing is to do with the will itself. By willing, or seeking to use things for our own purposes, we objectify the world in another way. We close the world down. It now becomes what we wish to use for our own ends. We are no longer observer but ‘consumer’ or perhaps ‘craftsman’ would be a better word. Now we seek to shape the world according to the rationality of our own needs and interests. We make it in some degree after our own image: in accordance with the particularity of our own motivations and interests, whether alone or in solidarity with others, with whom we may perceive a common interest of action.

And so the ground is laid to look again at our third subjectivity, which is where we act in responsibility for the other.⁶ The paradigm case here may be

5 Davies, Oliver, *A Theology of Compassion*. London: SCM Press, 2001, especially pp. 1–45 and 232–253.

6 There is a contrast to be drawn here between a ‘situational’ responsibility within space and time and Levinas’s ‘infinite’ responsibility for the other. See Levinas, E., *Otherwise than Being*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1981, pp. 81–86 and 93–94.

the good neighbour who comes to the aid of the other, who ‘feeds the hungry’. Here we come to the finality or closure of decision to act from within a radical irresolvable openness of *both* intellect and will. Intellect cannot find the resolution that comes with the certainty of irrefutability, but neither can the will find the resolution that comes with knowing that I have at least ‘got what I wanted’. At the very place where we are least defined, because unresolved in reason and will, we discover a different kind of resolution: the resolution which is the certainty of *irreversibility*. This is an historical kind of certainty; it is the certainty of history. And it is through the irreversibility of the act, a free and deliberated act for which we shall remain forever responsible, that we enter history. This is to be in history in a very particular way. It is to enter history, for instance, as an ‘I am’: I am here and now, this unique person, in this place and time, and I am making a judgement about decision to act, which is based only partly on the rationale of what I *know* or what I *will*. It is based more fundamentally on who I am or have become: on what feels right in this moment of time, in a way that allows me to accept the responsibility of *this* act, for all time. And by this act, the world will be changed, in ways that I can never know but for which I shall be nevertheless responsible.

From one perspective this appears to be a uniquely rich way of being historical. Here we are ‘in’ history in the particularity of who we are: in the fullness of our own personal and historical identity. I can bring whatever I have learnt from life into the moment of decision. It will reflect not just who I am but also who I have become. And the world will now be different, in however small a way, on account of the particular personal identity of the one who acts. But it is a place also of poverty. We enter history in this way only by slipping past the two great modes of objectification, whereby we are distanced – and thus also protected – from the world. Knowing and willing are the two key ways by which we take the world *on our own terms*. Accepting responsibility for action, for the sake of the other or others, is to enter history freely, which is to say in the fullness of our personal identity. At the same, we go there without the primary defences of the self *against* history. By entering into history itself, without defence, we are also accepting our own contingency, and thus our own existence as ‘rational animals’: thinking creatures given over into material causation. This is thus a way of accepting our own mortality which is the ultimate condition of creatureliness. It is a way also of accepting our own guilt: the guilt we incur through embodiment by which we are set into causal relation with other bodies, even those far away. This is the guilt which comes with nourishing, clothing and housing ourselves in an interdependent world. It is the guilt of consumption, in which we are all culpable since, once understood, we are all capable of renouncing our guilty practices and thus, in some small way, of genuinely making life easier for those

who are disadvantaged living further away. To enter history as act, stripped of the consolations of a controlling personal perspective expressed through reason and will, is to accept fundamentally our own nature as material beings: our interdependence and therefore guilt. At the same time it is to experience a possible solidarity with others who, in poverty, also enter history in this way.

Acting for the sake of the other or others of our 'third subjectivity', involving the suspension of how we naturally know the world and how we naturally will in the world when we seek our own interests, already opens up a new horizon of what it is to be a human being. It is here that we shall shortly need to use a specifically theological account of the act, while recognising the extent to which the act, as we have defined it, can and does occur in the natural order of things. But before we can do that, we shall need to consider the ways in which the natural order also militates against the act, in the sense in which we are using the term, as being 'free' or 'without defence' in history, for the sake of the other or others. And finally we shall need to come to the question of how this analysis of human historicity can both illumine and learn from the experience of those engaged in the work of aid agencies, where act, in the sense of 'feeding the hungry' may take on a uniquely professional and organizational relevance.⁷

Performance and act

It is easy to see that the act, as we have defined it, is a difficult place to be. It takes us far out of our 'comfort zone'. It exposes us to responsibility and to responsibility of action without being able properly to calculate the consequences. It will also expose us, if we work in poverty relief for instance, with some of the most abject situations anywhere in the world. If to act in history, without defence, for the good of the other is a radical form of poverty, from the perspective of how we habitually manage the world, then exposure to the concrete poverty of others can only intensify this sense of being oneself a refugee, in history. We can only enter history, where we can act in full personal integrity for the sake of the other, by being no longer at home in history. We become a resident alien then; and responsibility, which is always a responsibility within specific situations, makes of the power by which we are at home a certain kind of powerlessness. As material agents of change in the world, we make ourselves vulnerable to the contingency of life when we act, through responsibility. The unpredictability of cause and effect potentially undermines our claim to be rational or consistent as individuals in the way we actually act, or use our power.

⁷ I am using this term in an expanded sense, and not to suggest that aid and development in its economic and political complexity, is reducible to the individual act of feeding!

Unsurprisingly, we find it easier to avoid the radical uncertainties of act by remaining within a given set of rules of principles which guide our action in the kinds of situations we may find ourselves in. We follow our professional training or some given set of assumptions which in that situation may become an ideology for us, which is to say the real living out of a deception or illusion. All situations are particular, since all people are particular, but this allows us to identify the situation as being of a certain type. We know then what we must do. But equally we know that we are then living in the situation from only one perspective: we are reducing the complexity of life and simplifying the questions in order to arrive at certainty in our answer to the question: 'what should I do?' (I am a teacher, in this situation teachers do the following). This is to substitute the knowing-subjectivity of control for the riskful responsibility of agent-subjectivity, in the very domain of action. It is to 'technologize life' by drawing its raw actuality into the domain of knowing: 'I know what to do.' 'I have been taught what to do in these situations.' This is the language of performance, which is always a 'we' language: 'we perform' (we teachers do this), rather than the responsibility of 'I act'.

We find it difficult to act, with the risk and burden of responsibility, and so for the 'I act' we substitute the 'we perform'. We do that because we can. Where we have no 'we perform' to hide within, we have to confront the challenge of life in its raw actuality, its incalculable complexity, its risk and responsibility. And life does always come back to us in its raw actuality, of course. It will not be reduced and controlled in this way. In the first place we can experience the disruptions of illness, disability, relationship breakdown. We can experience the claims made upon us by the urgent needs of others. Even in the midst of life, we are not allowed to forget the inevitability of death for very long. Death is the ultimate disruption. More generally, the complexity of life and its decisions can confront us where we may think that we have ultimate control, as parent for instance, or as leader of a group or institution. There can be moments here when the everyday practices of our personal and professional existence become testing grounds, in which act, with its presuppositions about freedom, risk and responsibility, emerges as a challenge to be confronted or evaded. Neither parenting nor leadership can be adequately learned from books, only from life, since their challenges are likely to be irreducibly particular. And in both we may find that we hold at times considerable power to build or destroy. Act brings with it the disruption of habituated practices, whether personal or professional therefore. But it is precisely these 'learned' practices which reflect the enormous influence in our globalized society of professionalization, ideology and communicative systems. If act then disrupts these, it does so in a way that necessarily leads to its marginalization in our society.

Religion and act

It is not difficult to see that it is religions with their traditions of divine command and obligations to others, especially the disadvantaged and powerless, which are guardians of the act in the modern world. This does not mean that you have to be religious to act, in the pure sense. But it does mean that it is in religious traditions that the act as the human capacity to be 'in' history is most fully thematized and embedded. In the natural order, the act, with its responsibility and asceticism, is more likely to be mixed up with other factors and not to be separated out as a distinctive form of responsibility. Religions typically require the individual to adopt a public identity which proclaims a certain kind of self-denying form of life. Much is at stake therefore for the religious individual if, when faced with a situation of altruistic responsibility, they are not to be vulnerable to the accusation of hypocrisy. Likewise, religious demands tend to be eschatological, so that the weight of responsibility is felt more keenly. This is typified in Christianity where the narrative identity of the Christian is affirmed by the narrative itself to be dependent upon real acts in the world. It is not those who say 'Lord, Lord' who will be saved but 'the one who does the will of my Father in heaven' (Mt 7.21; Lk 6.46–9). According to Mt 25, attitudes to the poor, the vulnerable and the dispossessed are indicative of our true status as followers of Christ.

It is religion therefore which constitutes the chief challenge to the 'technologization' of the act. Here the act is made central to religious identity and is linked with a life in conformity to divine mandate and command. We do not have to hold that all Christians live in this way, not even that most do, in order to affirm that Christianity is nevertheless an orientation to the world, through doctrine and theology, which presupposes the priority of caritative acts, undertaken for the sake of the other or others. Given the eschatological nature of the divine command made present in human history in Jesus Christ, which poses an ultimate responsibility for the other and the world within faith, and an ultimate victory of God in Jesus Christ, it follows that the freedom supported by our 'third subjectivity' in its radical, religious form, is not that of a freedom from, or a freedom to, but rather a freedom *in* the world precisely because it turns out *to be God's world*.

Aid work and the act

And so we come to the question of how the work of aid agencies fits in with the paradigm of knowing and acting, within responsibility, outlined above. The point is well made in this volume that aid workers actually draw great support from their professional training and from their identity as well trained

professionals in the field. It is this that shields them from the immediacy of the suffering they encounter. Their work indeed may not be thinkable outside the context of such narrative identities. But is this not in fact to substitute the 'we perform' for the 'I act' at the very centre of agency work? This is a good starting point for reflection on the work of aid agencies and the act, as human entry into history, from where, in the fullness of our personal identity, we can act in a way that 'makes a difference'. The desire indeed to make a difference, so that the world becomes this world and not another, must in one way or another inform the decision of those who choose, and continue to choose, to dedicate their lives to this emotionally difficult and practically demanding work. What we find here then is a relation between narrative and act in the case of aid work which contrasts strongly with the depiction of narrative or 'performance' identity as undermining or even disabling the act which we have given above.

But let us return to the kind of disruption of practices by the act which we have described in the section 'Performance and act' above. The challenges of illness or misfortune (how shall I decide to continue to live with this illness or how shall I respond to the loss of my job?) or of the real needs of others (how shall I respond to this misfortune among my family and friends?) inevitably disrupt our habits and practices. We have to find time for other people and adjust our lives in accordance with their needs. Decision to act, to make ourselves available in that way, may lead to such adjustments, which are disruptive of our normal practices. But it could be the other way around. We could find that as a result of decision to act, with all the risks that are involved, we actually institute a new set of practices: practices which derive from that act. Is this not what happens when we make a vow with religious force? When I married my wife, for instance, I accepted the development of a new set of practices which would be shared with her. These were cast within a fundamental acceptance of the possibility that her presence in my life could lead to radical disruption and that I would allow her to disrupt me in that way (and vice versa). The new practices of married life, of this married life, were predicated upon the possibility of just such a disruption ('until death divide us'). The force of the act resides in the vow, which was a commitment for us both beyond the reach of rational calculation, with unforeseeable consequences, where the orientation of the will was both one of personal desire for the other and the recognition that the good of the other should be sought under all circumstances. And something similar perhaps is perceivable in the religious vow or vocation as such?

If we take the practices, including professional identity, of aid workers as being akin to the practices of the shared life of marriage, and, as such, as being predicated upon a prior commitment to a long term engagement with or openness to the disruptive needs of the other, then we can say that the act character belongs

to the initial ‘conversion’ or moment of commitment, of which the practices are the working out. This reverses the performance-act relation in situations where there is no prior vocational commitment. The moment of decision as vow or vocation (in the broad sense of the term) institutes a new way of being or of living in the world, since the act in its pure sense is our third subjectivity which fosters a freedom *in*: which is precisely a freedom *in* history or in the world. We can only enjoy this freedom ‘in’, which is not found in the natural order, in so far as the world has changed, or been transformed. Our new practices, which derive from the commitment in responsibility of act, are practices which reflect the newness of the world. They are the normativity of a world irreversibly transformed in the person of Christ. Reinhard Hütter rightly says that the agency of the Holy Spirit is always involved in the practices of the Church (which will certainly include the practices of those engaged in caritative work in the name of the Church).⁸ These are the practices then which in their purity are practices of or in a world, ‘newly created’, and not of or in a fallen world. As such they do not compromise the disruption of the act, but rather they normalise it. They can only do this ecclesially of course where they remain properly within the Spirit, which is to say within the deepest motivations of the body of Christ. Inevitably, in the actual lives of real individuals, this ‘normalization’ will bear the marks both of a transformed world and of a world that is untransformed and that resists the transformation of Christ. But that this particular set of professional practices (there is an analogy here to be drawn also with ordination) nevertheless remains in contact with, or needs to remain in contact with, if they are to be performed with integrity, the force of the initial motivation to act in a way that leads – by whatever route – to the alleviation of the suffering and ‘imprisonment’ of others. However far the job of the modern aid professional may lead from the historical actuality of ‘feeding the hungry’, into the complex bureaucratic systems of project management, public profiling and currency exchange rates, the motivation which makes these practices distinctive to this way of life (and it is a way of life) must be remembered and kept fresh if the practices – or professional way of life – are to remain meaningful in their own terms to those who choose them. In other words, here, in this case, practices themselves will not be enough (any more than the ‘life together’, rather than the real communion which underlies the ‘life together’ – or which the ‘life together’ makes possible – is in itself enough). The practices must be rediscovered to be somehow contained in the act, to be the working out of the real act of feeding the hungry, if they are to remain, for those who do them, rational practices: meaningfully centred in a human life.

8 Hütter, Reinhard, *Suffering Divine Things*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000, especially pp. 128–146.

Theological resources for aid work

This brings us to the question of what kind of theological resources are needed for the living out of a Christian vocation as aid worker in a world of deep inequalities in which the Church is called to exercise an ‘option for the poor.’⁹ Not scholarly ones presumably. And yet scholarship may have a contribution to make here. It would seem a truism to point to the importance of the Mass, as centre of devotional and theological life for Catholics, particularly Catholics ‘in the field’, for instance. But there is a way we can approach the Eucharist, in view of what has been said about the act, which may cast a particular light upon its direct relevance to aid workers. Scholarship teaches us, for instance, that the ground of Catholic sacramental theology is Christ in his mortal or earthly life on the one hand and Christ as ascended and in heaven on the other. In 1 Corinthians 11.23–6 we read about the institution of the Lord’s Supper: how Jesus proclaimed the words of blessing as he broke the bread at the Passover meal. This is the point at which Jesus makes free acceptance of his suffering and death to come. He recognises himself as *sacrifice*. According to scripture however it is only through the final and irreversible transformation of Jesus at his ascension, when he ‘withdrew’ and ascended into heaven, that Jesus entered into the fullness of his Lordship over space and time. In the classical tradition of Christianity, in his ascended form Jesus could be anywhere present, as wounded *and* glorified. This transformation universalised him in the particularity of his historical, personal and saving history. It is the ascended Jesus that St Paul meets on the road to Damascus, for instance, whom he recognises as the wounded Galilean, in his acceptance of him as Lord. Classical Christianity (which is to say through the Fathers and into the Reformation) bases the presence of Christ in the Eucharist upon his prior presence as ascended in heaven. The former is his ‘substantial existence’ while the latter, his heavenly existence, is his ‘local’ existence or embodied presence, which is to say his full presence in space and time (the body has not gone away; it has only changed). According to that tradition, classically expressed by St Augustine, the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is only possible because of his ‘local’ presence in heaven. In other words, in the Eucharist Christ’s presence ‘in heaven’ is made present also ‘on earth’. It is not that the Eucharist replaces or substitutes for Christ’s body, which has somehow withdrawn and is no longer around. According to the classical tradition, the body is still integral to Christ’s living humanity and divinity. To say that he is in the heaven of classical tradition is in fact to say that he is close to us, within the same finite universe which appeared on medieval maps. From that heaven (which we cannot conceive of in this form, of course) the body becomes real for us in the Eucharistic presence, though not in a way that takes up space in the

spacio-temporal continuum.¹⁰ And so we come to the question what does this have to do with the human act as entry into history, as outlined above? What does it have to do with the riskful and open-ended commitment of individuals to relieving the suffering of the poor, through working in aid agencies today?

The answer is that it has everything to do with it. Mt 25 already tells us that Christ will be among the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged. But he is among them in a particular way. He is not so much in them, as in the situation of their need. He is in the situation of the power-differential as we have called it. This means to say that where we have power to help others, who need our help, the possibility of human freedom comes into view. The world can be changed at such points, and changed for the Christian in accordance with divine command, which is always received in and by freedom (for it is a loving and not a coercive command). In other words, the possibility comes into view that we may have the courage to act, from that freedom, for the sake of the other.

And such an act will be sacrifice, for it will always be difficult. We shall risk ourselves for the other; we shall risk the integrity and meaning of our own lives. For perhaps we shall do the wrong thing. And perhaps there is no God. But in risking ourselves, through act, for the sake of the other, a further possibility will emerge from within our third, 'religious' subjectivity of loving obedience and command. In the moment we act, and freely accept the burden of shaping history in responsibility to the other or others, we are constituted in discipleship and, as disciples, we begin to recognise the one we follow. But how and where? Not in images certainly, nor in concepts, nor again in the propositions of faith, even creedal faith. We recognise him in the act, as bodies recognise each other, across cultures and traditions, and across even time, when one of the bodies is both human and divine. We recognise him in the embodied act itself, where we meet him as the one who has acted before us but uniquely in a way that crosses time. As our own embodiment in history becomes sacrificial, as we approach the closure and finality of decision to act in the difficult openness of unresolved intellect and will, as we enter the actuality of life where history is made, and do so in poverty as a refugee, stripped of our possessions and consolations: as we do this, so too do we begin to recognise with the knowledge of the body, the presence of another body very close to us, holding and supporting us, even in the precise moment of act, or risk. That is the body of Jesus, not to be seen or felt, but nevertheless to be known and recognised. It is a body which communicates across time precisely in its sacrificial acting, once and for all in history, which

9 *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, §42.

10 For an extended reading of the Ascension, see Oliver Davies, in Davies, O., Janz, P., and Sedmak, C., *Transformation Theology*, pp.11–62.

was the giving of life for all others, in loving obedience to the divine command, to do the Father's will.

To say that we act in him, and by our act, we know him, or recognise him, as the one of whom scripture and the creeds speak, who's acting goes before: to say this, may appear outlandish and strange. More mystical perhaps than is sensible in today's pragmatic world. But the Catholic Mass which is at the centre of the life, thought and feeling of the Church presupposes the real presence of Jesus among us. That is central to Catholic practice and faith. It is neither outlandish nor mystical. But in what form is he among us: how is he among us? He is among us in living form, as sacrifice. He is among us as act. This is the Eucharistic mystery, that an act performed two thousand years ago should be still active now, in a sense still happening. But it was a very singular act. For in this act, whereby a human being entered history in poverty and as refugee, not finding any kind of resolution beyond the resolution which is the act itself, in that act, the creator God himself entered the world, as the actuality of history, where the world becomes. The incarnation changed space and time in such a way that, through the Spirit, the space and time dividing his body from ours, his act from our act, became permeable to divine grace, conformed to his body, and so when we act, in the strong sense developed here, we do so in him. And so our professional practices and identity, as people called to 'feed the hungry', must also be ultimately grounded in him.

This conversation must be just a beginning. There is much to discuss and think about. What is the relation between the Eucharist as food for instance and the sacrificial act? Why do we receive his body in this way? What is the relation between Eucharist as food and feeding the poor, even in the systemic and professionalized way in which this needs to be done? How do aid workers, exposed to the horrors of Darfur for instance, hold together the professionalized narrative and identity with the immediacy of the act which alone gives it its proper meaning? In the everyday lives of those who do this work, this must be a central issue for the sustainability of individual commitment. But there are also questions on the horizon to do with the public face of the work of aid agencies. How do we or they communicate the act, which is our freedom in history, through the professionalized narrative with its sophisticated systems for generating financial and political support? How do we access compassion, which is always individual (and close to the act), within the public domain? Can aid agencies change the nature of the society in which we live? After all, is there not a kind of solidarity within the act: a moment of recognition from body to body across cultures, whereby we recognise others as individuals, as rational animals, who have borne or who do bear the burden of history? We recognise that they have in some small though nevertheless utterly real way,

accepted responsibility for the way the world is and how it will become, on the grounds of entering a difficult situation of power and powerlessness, in which, precisely by being at this time and place, they have found that they have a responsibility to act? Is this not a solidarity of the real? A community of those who have learned to live from their most radical freedom? And what kind of political expression or influence might such a recognition across cultures have, in times of global challenge, through world poverty and climate change, when everything else seems to divide us into separate worlds and traditions? The questions multiply. But at least our conversation has begun.

