

The Effects of Religious Fundamentalism in Developing Countries Sussex Development Lecture May 2014

Setting the Scene

My topic today is religious fundamentalism and its effect on development. I need to begin with a few words about my qualifications – or rather lack of them – to speak in 2014 on issues of development. After I left IDS in 1996 I continued to have some link with the topic through my work as chair of the committee on development of the Dutch government’s Advisory Council on International Issues. But that came to an end when I resigned to make way for younger people a bit over ten years ago. Since then I have continued with a small finger in the academic pie through my work at the Department of Anthropology of Utrecht University, where I have gone back to the topic that interested me at the beginning of my academic career, namely religion and society. When I started work in that field some fifty years ago, it was radical progressive Catholic priests in Latin America who held the attention. When I returned to the topic in the late ‘nineties, it was fundamentalists of all hues that were in the public eye. So I suppose I’m reasonably knowledgeable on the fundamentalism part of what I have to say. Anyway, I am honoured to have been asked to give this Sussex development lecture. I must warn you that I did speak, here, on a broadly similar topic some eight years ago – though I shall try not to repeat myself more than at the margins!

In the past twenty years or so the *importance of religion in people’s lives*, and its significance as part of their identity, *has increased considerably*. There have been different reasons for this in different places and contexts. I shall touch on some of them as we go along. Certainly in the Anglo-Saxon world politicians seem to have accepted that religion, more than any other ‘belief’, merits ‘respect’¹, and ever since Tony Blair they seem to be vying with each other to cosy up to ‘faith groups’ and the like.

The growing importance of religion: push and pull factors

In the wider world this increase in the importance of religion has been due both (to what we might call) ‘push’ factors, but also to ‘pull’ factors.

Let’s begin with some factors pushing people towards religion, especially in developing countries.

When development just *doesn’t happen*, or when – as is so often the case – economic changes only benefit a small part of the population (growing inequalities have *become a major issue* almost everywhere in the world, including in the North: think of the widespread interest in Piketty!), people’s hopes for better living standards are frustrated. In these circumstances, they are quite likely to listen to people who say that ‘God told them’ why this is so. Fundamentalist Sikhs in the Punjab had the ear of peasants hit by the unequal distribution of the benefits of the ‘Green Revolution’, while Islamic fundamentalists often focused on an urban ‘intellectual proletariat’. (Caplan 1987a) The Islamic Revolution in Iran has also been seen as a reaction to the

¹ Richard Dawkins points to the special respect granted to religion: “You can’t get away with saying, ‘If you try to stop me from insulting homosexuals it violates my freedom of prejudice.’ But you can get away with saying, ‘It violates my freedom of religion.’ What, when you think about it, is the difference? Yet again, religion trumps all.” (2007:46)

modernisation and secularisation promoted by the Shah, which led to growing inequality and increasing corruption under a centralised and ultimately arbitrary regime. (Keddie 1988) More recently, *Boko Haram* has been depicted as a reaction to lack of development in the North of Nigeria, and to an excess of brutality and violence on the part of the state – more about them below. If such *exclusion* is countered by proper ‘developmental’ measures, above all by the implementation of *policies that reduce overall socio-economic inequality*, it is less likely that people will feel the need to turn to those who promise ‘salvation’ by religious redemption.

Yet when development *does* happen, it also causes disruption, be it of a different kind. Development implies ‘modernisation’. Modernisation changes the way people see themselves. That’s fine for those who have been educated in the ‘European mould’, the (small) minority who hold the reins of government and who make the ‘modernising’ laws, affecting the lives of all. Nevertheless, most people in those societies continue to live by traditional norms, handed down from generation to generation within the family and the local – usually religious – community. Meanwhile the modernised public institutions implicitly assume that they, too, have changed, aggravating people’s sense of disorientation. So they look for support. They may turn to religious organisations, especially if these offer both a strong sense of community and strong individual support. That is precisely what tends to be offered by fundamentalists, and – as we shall see – this explains in part the phenomenal rise of the Pentecostal churches in Latin America and Africa. The same factors are relevant, as Ayubi has argued, in many contemporary Arab/Islamic societies. There is “...a high degree of dissonance, and conflict, between the ‘traditional’ values to which the individual has been socialised ... and the ‘modern’ values by which economic, administrative and legal organisations are supposed to be governed, especially in the urban, semi-industrialised and rather impersonal environment of the city.” (Ayubi 1991:44)

So much for what I have called the push factors. But there have also been *pull factors*. Most significant among these can be the increased presence of religious ‘activists’, who are often fundamentalists. This has been quite important (a) in the case of Islam, whose fundamentalists have had great impact throughout the world, and (b) in the case of American-based Pentecostal Protestants, who have phenomenally expanded their proselytising activities, notably in Latin America and Africa, with interesting and contradictory effects on development. More about this in a moment.

Religion and fundamentalism

As the issue before us is development and *fundamentalism*, and not development and *religion*, I better say a few words about the main similarities and differences. All religions rest on *belief*, and ultimately on belief in divine revelation. Modern, or ‘liberal’, versions of religion usually accept that no one religion contains the complete truth; therefore, they don’t try to impose their own views on others. More traditional approaches have less sympathy for religious pluralism. They may accept *some* reinterpretation, but they usually assert that theirs is the ultimate truth, given divine underpinning by direct reference to holy books. Most extreme in this respect are fundamentalist religious views.

So, *very briefly*, what is fundamentalism? From the many often overlapping definitions let me pick out the following main points.

- Fundamentalisms see religious authority as holistic and *absolute*.
- They accept neither criticism nor 're-interpretation'.
- They are on the whole intolerant of alternative views, including those of different fundamentalist groups within the same religion (such as Sunni versus Shi'a Islam). Each group sees its own teaching as absolutely correct.
- They demand public recognition of the do's and don'ts derived from their sacred writings, which, they say, contain unalterable truths, valid for all times.
- Most significant, perhaps, is the aim they virtually all share *to dominate the state* and have their religious views incorporated into the structure of society through *legal enforcement*.

Fundamentalists propound their views aggressively. They are particularly anxious that those *within their own circle* follow these views to the letter. They will also try to widen that circle as much as possible – in other words convince others of the correctness of their beliefs. Even so, few fundamentalists are willing to impose their views on others by *violent* means, or to die (let alone kill) for their beliefs. Yes, there *are* violent fundamentalists, (and these have particularly negative effects on development), but it cannot be said that fundamentalists, in general, are extremists.

In the case of Islam *all* believing Muslims (not only the fundamentalists) accept that Islam is the 'final religion' and the only true faith, a faith *that Muslims have a duty to spread*. The *Qur'an* and the *Sunna* (the body of traditional customs attributed to Muhammad) contain all the essential truths required by all humanity until the end of time. We shall see that this *can* lead to significant clashes with the contemporary prescriptions in development practice.

Finally, for now, fundamentalists reject the values of 'modernity'. This should not surprise us, as the secular and often explicitly non-religious values of modern societies are alien to people from traditional backgrounds, and can leave them deeply perplexed. So they are likely to listen to the views of those who claim to have 'answers' to those perplexities. And that is precisely what fundamentalists offer: *clarity and certainty for perplexed people*. "Follow us, and we *know* that God will solve your problems."

A first stab at fundamentalism and development

Let's now have a closer look at development, and consider the relevance to it of some of these characteristics of fundamentalism. It is a long time ago that we thought we could characterise development by a simple measure such as GNP/cap. For decades, now, we have got a fuller picture by approaching development via the Human Development Index – an approach that, itself, has been refined considerably over time. As a first line of attack, therefore, I tried to use some of the figures in the many tables now found in the Human Development Report. Unfortunately, that did not take me very far. This is mainly because there are no data on 'religiosity', so that any comparisons between more and less religious societies are merely based on broadly plausible assumptions. Let me just give one example.

Secular female education is for some fundamentalisms deeply taboo – notably of course for Jewish and Muslim fundamentalists (I won't talk about the former, because they aren't found in significant numbers in less developed countries). If you consider

the *proportion of women who have at least a secondary education*, there are some startling figures in the latest HDR, which gives an average for the five years 2006-2011.

For Europe and Central Asia the figure is 81.4 %. It won't surprise you that for poor Sub-Saharan Africa the figure drops to 23.7 %. That can't be explained by religion or culture. But in the Arab states, many of them rich by any measure, that proportion is overall no higher than 31.8 %. Some of the smaller countries (Brunei, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE) do have percentages that fluctuate around 70 %, and these are certainly countries where Islam is of central cultural (and political) importance. So some caution is required. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia, without any question a country where Islamic fundamentalists 'rule', and which has no shortage of resources (!), comes no higher than 50.3% on this measure. Difficult not to assume that here religion is a central factor in holding down this important indicator for development.

But such nation-wide data are of very limited use. Yes, there are a few countries we can characterise as 'fundamentalist', but indeed only a few. Elsewhere, if we had disaggregated statistics and knowledge of where the fundamentalists are concentrated (they do tend to cluster together) it might be possible to compare development indicators for 'fundamentalist' and 'non-fundamentalist' areas. Yet even then we would need much caution in interpreting the figures. If any of you, at the end of this story, are convinced that the issues are worth following up in a specific place, you will need to do original research – not least because data on religion are hardly anywhere available, let alone in disaggregated form.

So I shall just discuss some probable effects of fundamentalism on issues likely to affect the potential for human development in the case of two religions. I shall confine myself to Christianity and Islam, because Judaism is not really relevant to development issues, while my knowledge of Hinduism and Buddhism frankly doesn't go much beyond that of the 'average newspaper reader'. I shall rely on my book *Assertive Religion* for at least some of the discussion (de Kadt 2013). Let us start with Christianity.

Christian fundamentalism and its effects on development

Roman Catholicism

The Roman Catholic Church has a long history of involvement with development issues – on the whole very positive, as long as you disregard anything to do with sexuality – and with Pope Francis's open dislike for pomposity and ostentation inequality has re-emerged as a significant question. Yet, as we shall be talking about development and fundamentalism, Roman Catholicism falls outside the purview of this discussion. Even though it does harbour deeply conservative organisations such as *Opus Dei*, its centralised nature has prevented fundamentalist movements from taking root. Some of you may remember Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who died more than twenty years ago. His Society of St Pius XII, which opposed the *aggiornamento* of the Church brought about by the Vatican Council (Vatican II), was the closest the Catholic Church ever came to having a fundamentalist movement (he even consecrated four bishops who shared his views). But Lefebvre and his movement were speedily denied a place *within* the Church by Pope John Paul II. So while it emerged *from* the Catholic Church, we cannot really consider this to have been a *Catholic* fundamentalist movement. Nor has

any other taken root, since then. The centralised structure of the Catholic Church nips true fundamentalism in the bud.

Protestant Evangelicals: Pentecostalism

Fundamentalism does thrive among Protestants. In fact, it was among American Protestants that the term 'fundamentalist' was first coined (those 'going back to the fundamentals'). I shall base my discussion about Protestant fundamentalism and development largely on the Evangelical Pentecostals, a substantial proportion of whom can be regarded as fundamentalist. Over the last fifty years or so their growth in developing countries has been phenomenal, mainly as a result of the 'crusading' activities of North American missionary societies. This has been felt both in Africa and in Latin America. My discussion will largely focus on Latin America, though in relation to the issues that interest us, here, their impact on Africa has been comparable.

Exclusion

Exclusion has probably been the most significant factor in the rise of Pentecostal movements. At the end of his paper on Pentecostals in Chile, Sepulveda draws the conclusion that Pentecostalism should be 'located' "... in the context of the struggle of the mestizo and indigenous underclasses, the *bajo pueblo*, to reassert their cultural identity and their 'religious self-determination'." (1996:314) Similarly, Freston (2001) notes for the well-documented case of Mexico, where indigenous communities have long been dominated and exploited by *mestizos*, that conversion to Protestantism was seen by these communities as a way to escape that domination, at least in the symbolic realm. He also points out that the turn to evangelical Protestantism by the exploited peasants brought about enormous hostility, and even violence, from their oppressors. The economically dominant conservative Catholic *mestizos* demanded of their underlings that they choose between their religion and getting support from the traditional clientelistic system. Freston writes: "The opposition goes from social pressure, through ostracism and threats, to violent expulsion and even murder. More than thirty thousand Indians have been expelled from their lands by the local *caciques*. ... Sometimes they are presented with a choice: renounce evangelical faith or sign a document that they are 'voluntarily' abandoning their land and belongings. No other group in Mexico has suffered such prolonged persecution." (ibid:209)

Poverty is punishment for sin

Pentecostals stress the centrality of the individual's free will, seeing poverty or being dominated as a punishment for sin: it's all your own fault, ultimately. There is a remarkable parallel, here, with the doctrines of neo-liberalism: for neo-liberals, too, individual effort is seen to explain social outcomes. (Gaskill 1997) Economic or social structures and processes are effectively ignored; from a developmental perspective that's hardly a promising start. Yet there is a paradox in this relation to neo-liberalism: Pentecostal movements have also been a *reaction* by the poor to the problems that neo-liberalism brought about. When the wider society values people for what they are *worth*, not for what they *are*, people seek out places where, as Gaskill (ibid:74) puts it, "meaningful and fulfilling social interaction can take place". Pre-eminent among these places are the family, and those religious organisations that emphasize the individual.

Has Pentecostalism been beneficial to people?

In many respects, Pentecostalism has had a beneficial effect on the personal lives of its adherents: among Latino Pentecostals, at least, inter-personal violence, drunkenness, and *machismo* have all receded, the position of women has improved, and

Pentecostals usually have a greater sense of self-respect than others around them. These are important changes, and – you would have thought – relevant to development: Pentecostal communities might have been expected to better their situation, reducing poverty and inequality. By analogy with Max Weber’s analysis of Calvinism, they should have improved their economic well-being because of their individual effort. But no: as Gaskill (1997) noted, when he explicitly addressed this question, the contemporary Pentecostal belief system does not appear to produce such a ‘Weberian’ effect. Others have reached very similar conclusions. (Pedrón-Colombani 2000; Corten 2000) As the emphasis is on freeing oneself from the clutches of Satan (poverty is *his* work), Pentecostalism leads neither to a clear set of economic aspirations, nor to social mobility. Poor Pentecostals tend to remain poor.

Even so, Pentecostal discourse does help people to relate to misery in a *different* manner. Misery is no longer simply a question of desolation. After conversion, Pentecostals do find a new sense of dignity and refuse to ‘accept’ poverty and to wallow in self-pity. Their religion helps believers *cope* with chronic poverty: even when they do not confront structural problems, Pentecostalism makes it easier for them to ‘manage’ these, also through their participation in existing networks of state patronage. (Gaskill 1977) So it is just possible that *in the long run* adhering to this particular version of fundamentalism might have a beneficial effect on the economic well-being of believers – and hence on development in a wider sense. However, *for now* the bottom line is that religion does not help Pentecostals actively to overcome their misery.

Pentecostals and politics

A brief examination, here, of a last issue: the political outlook of Pentecostals. As I have argued, the fact that they feel to be personally ‘responsible’ for their socio-economic situation takes attention away from social-structural issues. Beyond that, some have drawn the conclusion that they are not (actively) concerned about issues of social justice. It has also been noted that they have often supported dictatorships. So, do they tend to be reactionary in politics?

Are they reactionaries?

In fact, the picture is rather complex. (Smith 1994) To begin with, Pentecostals are strongly respectful of the rule of law, and this may lead them to oppose rulers who are not. Yet they have often supported autocratic regimes, be it that the reasons for such support have been varied. In the case of Guatemala, the fact that General Efraín Ríos Montt, who took power in that country after a military coup in March 1982, had converted to Pentecostalism in 1979, is likely to have influenced poor Pentecostals to support him. (Pedrón-Colombani 2000) Elsewhere, their deep hostility to Catholicism may have been more important, making them shun politicians with close links to the Catholic Church, such as Chile’s Christian Democrats. These strongly opposed the dictatorship of Pinochet, who was consequently supported by many Pentecostals. (Sepulveda 1996)

Participation encouraged, but effect limited

Yet they *do* promote participation and encourage lay leadership, which can uplift people who are poor and otherwise excluded. In addition, literacy is held in high regard, as this is important for reading the Bible. Moreover, according to Pentecostal doctrine the Holy Spirit can descend upon anyone, whatever his or her status in life; this has

helped raise the self-esteem of women, and encouraged them to stand up to the *machismo* and the drinking of their men. (Smith 1994; Sepulveda 1996)

In fact, after converting to Pentecostalism many believers have developed a new sense of identity, in which equality and a strict adherence to moral principles are prominent. Yet this has not really made them stand up against disingenuous promises, backroom deals, or 'big men' politics: such traditional elements of authoritarian cultures are merely morphed into slightly adapted forms that fit with those to which people have always been accustomed. (Gaskill 1997, reporting on various other authors) So, in parallel with the situation in the economic domain, Pentecostalism has *not* resulted in a 'clean break' in political terms – though here, too, one might argue that *in the longer run* the 'cultural', and hence political, influence of the Evangelicals may become more significant. In David Lehmann's words: "Theirs may not be a political revolt, but it is at least a mass expression of cultural dissidence, with its social base clearly among low-income groups." (2006:291)

Islamic fundamentalism and development

Islamic fundamentalism is important for our theme for three main reasons. In the first place, because Islam is the second largest religion in the world (after Christianity). Secondly, because in Islam the distinction between mainstream and fundamentalist is less clear than it is among most other religions, a fact that has considerable significance for a number of development issues. And in the third place, because the bulk of Muslims are in fact found in developing countries.

Where do we find the main concentrations of Muslims? Unfortunately, most breakdowns are based on a considerable amount of guesswork, as few countries publish statistics on religious affiliation. A table, said to be based on figures from the Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year 2008, suggests that in mid-2007 there were some 1,387m Muslims in the world, of which some 27 % were found in Africa and 69 % in Asia.² The website of the Pew Research Center, usually a reliable source, gives the total number of Muslims in the world in 2010 as 4,799 m.³ Pew also gives a figure for the overall world population that is three times as high as that given by the UN and other sources. There is manifestly an error, here, particularly as a detailed table in Wikipedia, said to be based on the Pew figures for 2010, shows the total number of Muslims as 1,620m – see summary table, below.⁴ That figure makes a great deal more sense, when compared to the earlier figure given.

² As given in The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2010, Infobase Publishing, NY

³ http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/explorer/#/?subtopic=15&countries=Worldwide&chartType=bar&year=2010&data_type=number&religious_affiliation

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_by_country. I have sent an e-mail to Pew, alerting them to the error.

Area	Muslim total	Muslims as % of popn	% of all Muslims
South & Southeast Asia	1,005,507,000	24.8	62.1
Middle East-North Africa	321,869,000	91.2	19.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	243,154,000	29.6	15.0
Europe	44,138,000	6.0	2.7
Americas	5,256,000	0.6	0.3
World Total	1,619,924,000	23.4	100.0

So I am inclined to say no more than that there around 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, around a quarter of the total world population, with the vast majority of Muslims found in developing countries.

Whatever the 'precise' total, the table does clearly identify the main areas/countries with substantial or predominant Islamic populations. In Asia, Muslims make up around a quarter of the total population and they constitute just under two thirds of all Muslims in the world (Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim Population, but India, Pakistan and Bangladesh also contribute substantially to the total). In the Middle East and North Africa they make up around 90 % of the total population, while in Sub-Saharan Africa that proportion is close to a third.

Approaching Islam and development through Human Rights

Islam's fundamentalist and mainstream varieties are closer together than is the case for other world religions, mainly because for *all* believing Muslims Islam is the one and only true faith. Yes, there is a Qur'anic injunction that there should be no compulsion in religion, yet this clashes with other prescriptions about spreading the faith, a faith which is seen as containing all necessary guidelines – for all time – for living in the world.

Islamic reactions to the ideas underlying human rights – which I shall use as a way to access issues of development – provide a good example of the meshing of mainstream and fundamentalist views. I will not go into the long history of the development of the idea of human rights, but there have been Islamic objections to them right from their emergence soon after WWII. Sure, most countries with Islamic majorities that were members of the United Nations at that time signed the original Universal Declaration (1948), though Saudi Arabia did abstain. But Islamic countries were never comfortable with parts of this Declaration and its more detailed successors, and they were in the forefront of arguing that these constituted a 'Western' imposition of its values on the rest of the world. While Islamic law can 'accommodate' a substantial part, notably of the civil and political rights, it was argued that accepting some of the rights – especially those dealing with issues of authority, equality, and gender⁵ – should

⁵ Islam is, of course, not the only religion where human reactions to gender are given a divine flavour. Richard Holloway beautifully paraphrases how men have kept women 'at bay' in the Church: "We ourselves have no prejudices against women; indeed, if it were up to us we would alter things to accommodate their obvious

be resisted in the name of ‘cultural differences’.⁶ Let it be said that all religious fundamentalists have reservations about human rights: any group that believes that some time in the past all rights and duties were laid down by God will not feel bound by such human ‘artefacts’ as Human Rights Conventions. But among Muslims such reservations are found among the mainstream – a good example of the fuzziness of the demarcation between mainstream and fundamentalists, there.

From the early 1980s these reservations led to the elaboration of a specifically Islamic approach to Human Rights – one in consonance with Islamic law (*shari’a*). It is clear that the views of Islamic fundamentalists played a major part in this development, though it was carried forward by presumably mainstream Islamic states. After some ten years these efforts eventually culminated in the so-called Cairo Declaration of 1990.

Two foci of inequality

Although there are considerable areas of overlap, this Declaration has a quite different ‘feel’ from the Universal Declaration or the later Covenants, notably in its repeated insistence on the centrality of Islamic law, the *shari’a*. Here are just a few examples relevant to the policy choices of developing countries. Article 19 states that neither crimes nor punishments are recognised except those provided in the *shari’a*; article 22 that opinions may be expressed freely, provided they are not contrary to the principles of *shari’a*; and articles 24 and 25 make *shari’a* the only source of reference or clarification of all the rights and freedoms stipulated. On one issue the Declaration states the precise opposite of the Universal Declaration, which enshrines the freedom of religion and the individual’s right to choose and change it: Muslims are expressly forbidden to convert to another religion or to become atheists (Islam punishes apostasy with death – a punishment Sudan stated just recently it intends to apply to a woman born of a Christian mother). Not the most significant issue in a development context, yet one that does set the tone for much of the debate.

Unequal treatment is not only the fate of *non-Muslims*: states that give an important place to Islamic law, also treat *men and women* unequally. There are many rules about daily behaviour that place women under the ‘supervision’ of husbands or elder brothers. Others forbid women to engage in certain activities – the Saudi law prohibiting women from driving has been much commented upon and is increasingly challenged, there. In Iran, according to Amnesty International, women have fewer, or ‘lesser’, rights than men in many areas – around questions of marriage, divorce, child custody or inheritance, and in relation to criminal harm suffered by women, which is less heavily punished than that suffered by men. One of the most discriminating rules (under both Sunni and Shi’a law) is that which states that in an Islamic Court of Law a woman’s testimony is worth half that of a man’s, thereby contradicting the principle of equality before the law that has been accepted in non-Islamic societies for generations, and which is also a central pillar of development policy. It is, incidentally, clearly an embarrassment to less conservative Islamic thinkers.

frustrations; unfortunately, God has different ideas. He has fixed these things for ever, and who are we to fight against God?” (2004:73)

⁶ Some ‘Western’ writers can be pretty accommodating to these challenges. Thus, for example, Felice: “While existing human rights standards should be maintained, they should be respectfully implemented through a cross-cultural dialogue of mutual learning. Those of one cultural tradition ‘must never even appear to be imposing external values in support of the human rights standards they seek to legitimize within the framework of the other culture.’” (the secondary quote is from Abdullahi An-Na’im) (Felice 1999:596)

Muslim women, today, may place this inequality in perspective, by recalling that in the Prophet's time women had no rights at all: they were *given* (limited) rights by Muhammad. Even so, what was 'progressive' in the first millennium is hardly so in the 21st century. Yet mainstream Islamic thought has not evolved much from those early views, largely because of its insistence that those views are valid 'for all times and all places'.

Other orientations problematic for development

But in addition to this unequal treatment of Muslims and non-Muslims, and men and women, there are other specifically Islamic 'orientations' – strongly pushed by its fundamentalists – that will influence the developmental stance of Islamic states. Under Islamic law it is unacceptable that a Muslim be politically subordinated to a non-believer. This led a Northern Nigerian Islamic leader, referring to this rule, to argue at the end of the 1980s when President Babangida wanted to institute a two-party system, that in that case there could only be a *Muslim* and a *Christian* party. (Coulon 1993) Other Islamic rules, pushed by fundamentalists, lead to the denial of the freedom of religion and of expression, the liberal prescription of the death penalty and the widespread use of so-called inhuman and humiliating punishments.

As for the latter, in the last twenty years or so a number of Islamic countries – among them Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia, Northern Nigeria and most recently Brunei – have revived ancient Islamic penalties such as crucifixion, stoning, amputation of limbs and forcible blinding for so-called 'offences against God' (*hadd* crimes). This has been justified by the argument that "...so-called human rights have to give way to divine rights". (Kadri 2011:195)

Underlying views

What about the views that underlie those positions, be they called mainstream or fundamentalist?

Abul-'Ala Mawdudi is one of the most systematic and influential twentieth century writers on Islam. For Mawdudi God is sovereign (*not* 'the people'), and the Law is laid down by God through his Prophet. That defines the essential characteristics of an Islamic state. "Where an explicit command of God or his Prophet already exists, no Muslim leader or legislature ... can form an independent judgment." An Islamic state is universal and all-embracing: "Its sphere of activity is coextensive with the whole of human life." Non-Muslims "will not ... be allowed to influence the basic policy of this ideological state." (from an extract of his *Political Theory of Islam* (1976) in Donohue & Esposito 2006:265f) Mawdudi also made the related point that 'unbelievers' should not be allowed to rule over Muslims: "The authority to rule should only be vested in those who follow the true faith; unbelievers who do not follow this true faith should live in a state of subordination" and pay the religious tax (*jizyah*) as long as they "cling to their errors". (From Mawdudi's *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, Vol. 3, quoted in Bostom 2008a:43)

Other views are even more directly relevant to development. Almost twenty years ago Ziauddin Sardar noted – with approval (!) – in the European Journal of Development Research how Islamic scholars have come to reject the whole apparatus of concepts and approaches of development studies because these are materialistic and

deny the fact that “... to be a complete human being, an individual must direct all his or her activities towards the service of God.” (1996:47) More recently, Ilyas Ba-Yunus went even further: “In Islam personal worship and obedience to the rules of other institutions are the two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other. ... Above all, it means that for a Muslim to be pious, altruistic and peaceful within and without, not only is a personal devotion to God a requirement, but also an Islamic institutional environment in which to live as a Muslim.” (2002:107) It seems reasonable to draw the conclusion that mainstream Islamic piety in and by itself strains towards one of the central characteristics of Islamic fundamentalism, the transformation of the surrounding society into one that is ‘Islamic’.

Islam and human development – notes from Africa

All this suggests that the impact of Islam on human development is not particularly positive, and that it becomes more negative as the stance becomes more fundamentalist. In respect of economic policies there appears to be little more than a general demand for social justice, which – it is usually argued – will ‘naturally emerge’ if the *shari’a* were to become the law of the land. In fact, there is a widespread view to which I referred in *Assertive Religion*, notably as summarized by Meyer (2001), that the political and socio-economic effectiveness of *all* religious fundamentalisms is pretty limited: keeping your eyes excessively focused on God, and wanting to make sure others do the same, results in a lack of attention for less exalted inner-worldly questions. One of the most frequently heard complaints about Iran’s government, for example, is that it simply does not respond to people’s day-to-day needs, particularly in economic terms.

Even so, the reality is more nuanced. Take the situation of Muslims in Sub-Saharan Africa, where we find various and often mutually antagonistic groupings in the different countries, backed by different imams, whose interpretations of the ‘essentials’ of Islam can be quite diverse.

In *Northern Nigeria*, for example, some Islamic fundamentalists see themselves as engaged in an ideological labour in society, aimed at its moral and social reconstruction. One of the more radical groups, the Muslim Students Society, encouraged students to boycott Western sciences, because these ‘disregard Allah’s name’, but they also called for a revival of Islam to bring Islamic solutions to society’s problems. As true fundamentalists they saw themselves as renewing the ‘*authentic tradition*’, and their main targets were the notables, foreign religion and imperialism. In contrast, the (Sufi) Islamic Brotherhoods were closer to the grass roots, but they have often been attacked (by those who regard themselves as true believers) for promoting unorthodox and ‘barbaric’ views. The Brotherhoods tended to link up with trade union and political movements that focused on improving the situation of the poor, which has had as a positive effect on social welfare and political consciousness. (Coulon 1993) This was akin to what happened in many other less developed countries where, during the years of structural adjustment, Islamic institutions played a significant role in helping to shield the poor from the worst effects of the withdrawal of the state. Keep that in mind, when I focus on less positive aspects.

The position of women

Yet in Africa the situation of Muslim women is hardly encouraging from the point of view of human development, in line with what I mentioned earlier. Take Burkina Fasso, where a short-lived explicitly secular ‘revolutionary’ regime in the 1980s saw

religion, and especially Islam, as an obstacle to development. Yet it achieved little, and after its demise the succeeding government regarded the earlier enacted family code as incompatible with an Islamic view of society, as it made men and women equal. The then prevailing view among the 'anti-Western reformers' was that *if* women were to be educated, they should be educated to become good Muslims, good spouses and good mothers, avoiding any kind of mixing with men: "the advancement of women stops where their duties as obeying spouses and devoted mothers begin". They strenuously objected to attempts to emancipate women from their husband's domination. (Otayek 1993:120)

In Islamic Northern Nigeria the seclusion of married women among the Hausa is fully accepted – and note: *also* by the women themselves. There, most girls get married between the ages of nine and twelve, because at a later age they are no longer considered a 'good match'. This has had major effects upon girls' education: once married, women no longer go to school. Many people are suspicious of the secular school system, instituted after Independence. They see it as 'Western' and contrary to proper education (which is Qur'anic), just as they disapprove of 'modern' occupations for women – teachers, secretaries, or nurses are even likened to prostitutes. One response was an adult education programme for married (secluded) women, presented as *religious* education, which did indeed have positive effects. On the one hand, calling it religious education made it easier for the women to get their husband's assent, which is required. On the other hand it enabled women to question some of the assertions of their husbands that this or that action or demand had to be accepted, because it 'comes from the Qur'an', while it also led to literacy – first in Arabic (to read the Qur'an), eventually also in Hausa. It also enabled secluded women to communicate with each other through messages, which helped reduce their sense of isolation. (Reveyrand-Coulon 1993)

But those existing limitations upon education are not enough for the *extreme* (and extremist) fundamentalists of *Boko Haram*, who want to impose an Islamic state, ruled by the *shari'a*. Their name means 'Western education is sinful', and one of their main objectives is to eliminate such 'Western' education. The government has on and off attempted to halt their activities, but troops have often used wholly counterproductive extreme violence and brutality, which in turn encouraged more people to join the group. One source suggests there are now some 30,000 of them!⁷ We've heard much about their latest 'exploit', which happened only a matter of weeks ago, when they abducted well over a two hundred school girls from a boarding school in Northern Nigeria's Borno state, announcing that they would force them into marriage or sell them into slavery, as has been reported extensively in the media. But they terrorise in other ways, too, destroying whole villages and killing their non-fundamentalist inhabitants. And all that 'in the name of Islam'.

Even so, while Islam is manifestly antagonistic to the equality of women, Muslim women are increasingly challenging that inequality from within Islam. This has been well documented for Europe, as shown by various authors to whom I referred in *Assertive Religion*. But it is equally true in Africa. Odile Reveyrand-Coulon's basic message is that – whatever the formal 'rules' – women do find new ways around the restrictions of Islam. Even though their margin of freedom remains limited, many of

⁷ Admittedly only a journalistic source: *Le Figaro* of 14 May 2014.

them no longer passively accept their reality as a 'cultural given', and reinterpret their situation, often by referring to texts from the Qur'an different from those held up by authoritarian husbands or mullahs.

Brief Conclusion

By now, my main points should be fairly clear, so I will not use much space trying to pull it all together.

In the recent breast-beating about *Boko Haram*, we have heard repeatedly that all would have been well if only more resources had been channelled to that part of Nigeria – if there had been more development, there. No doubt Piketty would have something to say about the neglect of the North. But a revolt against that neglect, and the underlying inequality, did not have to take an extremist fundamentalist form, though it might be argued that, in Northern Nigeria, this is an easily available option in terms of the existing culture. So, on the issue of *fundamentalism arising as a result of the lack of development* the jury is, in my view, still out.

What *is* clear, on the contrary, is that there are certain brands of *fundamentalism that seriously inhibit development* as we now define it. Maybe not *all* fundamentalisms (remember the ambiguous conclusion about Pentecostal fundamentalists); even so, it seems to me that, overall, fundamentalism has little to commend itself from the point of view of development.

The issues that face those having to make decisions about development policy are not made any clearer by people – of whatever background – who really do believe that, through their direct line to God, they can come to unambiguous political conclusions. Smilde's remark on the role of Pentecostals in Venezuela is worth repeating, here: Pentecostals support Evangelical candidates because they are seen as people who "... through the schema of spiritual communion ... *know the Truth*". (Smilde 2002:16; my italics) It is not that they hold particular political views, nor that they stand for certain kind of policies. It is simply that their God-given certainties are shared by their equally fervent co-religionists. Such certainties also determine the views of Islamists.

For all their undoubted good intentions, 'true believers' are dangerous to political processes, including to those that might help diminish poverty, inequality and exclusion: for them there are no uncertainties, the answers are given and *known*. End of argument: the 'correct' answers have been provided by God.

For those of us who even struggle with finding the right *questions*, such God-given certainties about the *answers* are truly less than helpful.

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