Spirituality: a development taboo

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> *If it weren't for those of us who listen to the Word and do the* composturas, *there wouldn't be any maize or beans.* (Isaías Vásquez, Lenca indian, Honduras)

> *CARE does not have a 'policy' on spirituality…We concentrate on the physical and social well-being of communities.* (H. Rourke, CARE Canada)

For most people of the 'South',[1] spirituality is integral to their understanding of the world and their place in it, and so is central to the decisions that they make about their own and their communities' development. Their spirituality affects decisions about who should treat their sick children, when and how they will plant their fields, and whether or not to participate in risky but potentially beneficial social action. Despite the evident centrality of spirituality to such decisions, the subject is conspicuously under-represented in the development discourse. Development journals are replete with analyses of the need for effective development practice to integrate those factors that influence people's world-view, such as gender, indigenous knowledge, and social structure. However, a content analysis of three leading development journals over the last 15 years found only scant reference to the topics of spirituality or religion. In fact, during this period two of these journals contained not one article in which the relationship between development and religion or spirituality was the central theme. A policy review of three influential development organisations also demonstrated not only that these have no policy on how to treat the issue of spirituality, but that they consciously seek to avoid the topic in their programmes. The result of this silence is a failure to explore and understand an integral aspect of how Southern people understand the world, make decisions, and take action. This failure reduces the effectiveness of development research and interventions. Ultimately it

robs the poor of opportunities to tap into whatever strength, power, and hope that this dimension gives them; and it deprives them of opportunities to reflect on and control how their development and spirituality shape each other.

Before proceeding, definitions of spirituality and development are in order. I will define *spirituality* as a relationship with the supernatural or spiritual realm which provides meaning and a basis for personal and communal reflection, decisions, and action. While *religion* is generally considered an institutionalised set of beliefs and practices regarding the spiritual realm, spirituality describes the personal and relational side of those beliefs, which shape daily life. So while one could be spiritual without being religious or vice versa, in practice the two are commonly intertwined, as people experience and describe their spirituality from a religious perspective.

Eade and Williams (1995) describe development as 'strengthening people's capacity to determine their own values and priorities, and to organise themselves to act on these'. Spirituality is a powerful factor in shaping many people's decisions and actions and often gives them a sense of power and hope. The failure to provide spaces for people to understand, explore, and ultimately to determine how development programmes should affect their spirituality, and in turn their society, is anti-developmental. It reduces people's capacity to determine their own values and priorities, it silences a part of their identity, and it deprives them of opportunities to decide how their spirituality will shape their future.

Addressing the issue of spirituality and development is not without its risks. Spirituality and religion have often been sources of conflict and oppression, rather than development and liberation. But just as social scientists and practitioners have recognised that gender, class, and ethnicity, while sources of conflict, are integral components of people's identity and must be taken fully into account in development efforts, so spirituality and religion, because they are so central in the lives of people living in poverty, must also be addressed. To ignore any of these issues will not eliminate potential conflict, but only contribute to a lack of understanding, a lack of voice, and a strengthening of those who believe themselves wiser or more 'developed'.

Spirituality and development for the Lenca

The Lenca indigenous indians, living in western Honduras, are descendants of the more familiar Mayans. While some vestiges of the Lenca culture remain, the people have largely adopted the language,

dress, and culture of the dominant Hispanic society. The Lenca are one of the poorest and most isolated groups in Honduras today. The village of Monteverde, in which I lived with my family for over six months, was an eight-hour hike from the nearest road. I moved there to try to understand how such a poor and isolated group was able to mobilise nearly 4,000 people to demand improvements in government services. What I found was that, for most participants, their spirituality was a significant mobilising factor.

While nearly all Lenca consider themselves Christian and Catholic, the Lenca spirituality is a synthesis between Catholicism and their traditional religion. Each rural community has several Catholic lay-leaders who conduct weekly religious services in a rustic chapel. The parish priest visits several times a year to perform weddings and christenings, and to celebrate mass. In addition, each community has several traditional religious leaders who lead rituals and diagnose and treat illnesses and other problems. Some tension exists between the leadership of the two traditions, each believing that it is better at following God's prescripts. Some spiritual observances such as pilgrimages, house shrines, and healing practices are accepted by both traditions; however, the Catholic Church condemns other ceremonies, such as the *compostura* (described below), as drunken, satanic rituals.

The spiritual leaders, both Catholic and traditional, gain their positions not through election or inheritance, but by earning the trust and respect of at least one sector of the community, based on their past actions and sound counsel. Neither tradition distinguishes between the sacred and the secular. A sick child, dying livestock, or the question of whether to participate in risky social action are spiritual as well as physical problems, requiring both prayer and action. As one Catholic lay-leader says, 'God inspires us. Sometimes we don't know what to do or where to turn; then we ask God to help us, and suddenly the decision is clear.'

I will cite briefly three areas that are central to current development efforts among the Lenca and highly influenced by this people's spirituality.

Agriculture

The traditional Lenca creation story asserts that when the first man started to clear the land for his first maize plot, the weeds and trees began to bleed and cry out. As a result, God told him to carry out a ceremony called the *compostura*, during which the man should sacrifice

domestic animals to God and the earth, to ask forgiveness for the violence he was about to do (Chapman 1992). In the contemporary *compostura*, the hosts invite all villagers to help to plant their maize, after which they serve the workers a meal prepared from the sacrificed animals and provide *chicha* (a fermented maize drink) and dance music. This ceremony demonstrates not only how Lenca spirituality shapes local agricultural beliefs and practices, but also how these in turn strengthen their respect for the earth and their social ties of co-operation and community.

The *compostura* has survived and adapted to centuries of religious and economic pressures. However, in recent years these pressures have been increased by 'scientists' in the form of government and NGO agronomists. According to those whom I interviewed, none of the 'professionals' working in the area has reflected with the villagers on the social, economic, and spiritual costs or benefits of abandoning the *compostura*. Nevertheless, through inattention and at times open derision, they are hastening the demise of this spiritual and communal tradition. Some villagers have adopted a modern scientific perspective regarding the *compostura*, stating that 'the agronomists have shown us that [those who practise it] are wasting their time and money, and it makes no difference, we get the same harvest in the end'. However, another village elder, Isaías Vásquez, argues for a spiritual and communal perspective, rather than a scientific and individualistic one. He contends that God does not respond to test plots, but that 'if it weren't for those of us who listen to the Word and do the *composturas*, there would be no maize or beans. I hope to God we never quit.' It is clear that the changes which the agronomists are promoting affect not only agricultural practices but also the role of spirituality in the production of food, villagers' respect for the earth, and the maintenance of social ties. Because the impact of 'modern' agricultural methods on traditional agriculture and spirituality has not been discussed openly, neither the agronomists nor the villagers can reflect on the wisdom of these changes or develop a synthesis of the two perspectives.

Health

The traditional health-care system of the Lenca relies on midwife healers, most of whom are women, who use treatments which they believe were given to their people by God. The healers are often spiritual leaders in the village, and their treatments include prayer, traditional/herbal medicines, and treatments such as sweating, massages,

and purges. While modern medicine deems some of the treatments, such as purging a child who has diarrhoea, to be dangerous, other treatments such as massages and herbal medicines are considered harmless or even helpful. The connection between health and spirituality is clear for villagers like Bernardo Bejarano, who states that 'the healer treats us with massages and prayers, but it is God who heals'. Each village's healers are available day and night and will often stay with their patients until they are well. They are compensated with goods and favours such as a chicken, fruits, vegetables, or help in their fields. The traditional health-care system demonstrates not only the powerful connection between spirituality and health for the Lenca, but also how their spiritual and health system reinforces social ties of interdependence and trust, and creates space for women in leadership.

When the first government medical doctor arrived in 1994 in the Lenca region of San Francisco de Opalaca, he immediately began the task of setting up the region's first health centre, with a wall full of medicines. This medical professional never met with the traditional healers and within days began to disparage the Lenca for mixing 'modern' medicine with visits to their traditional healers. He criticised the healers for advising patients to abandon their antibiotics or for administering other treatments which he claimed would interact dangerously with 'modern' medicine. As a result, villagers began to feel that they must choose between their traditional healers, with whom they had strong spiritual and social connections, and the newly arrived health professional and his 'modern' medicine. Santana Gómez, a Lenca villager, argued that 'God and the elders have been healing us for years; these doctors with their modern medicines are here today and gone tomorrow'. The changes that the doctor promoted required not only a change in health practices but also a suppression of the role of spirituality and spiritual leaders, many of them women, in a key area of village life. It was a change that had serious spiritual, social, gender-related, and health consequences. Once again, villagers felt that they must choose, but were not given the space to discuss and reflect on the effects of change, or on how the two systems might be integrated.

Social action

On 10 July 1994, more than 4,000 Lenca men, women, and children marched into the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, camped out under the Congress building, and announced that they would not leave until the government granted their demands. They called this event the

Pilgrimage for Life, Justice, and Liberty. After six days of pressure, the government signed a 52-point plan which granted the Lenca the majority of their requests, including a road into their region, three health centres, and several schools.

One of the principal means for mobilising this number of 'pilgrims', some of whom had never before left their village, was the spiritual characterisation of the event. The Lenca were participating not in a march or protest, but in a pilgrimage, a practice common both to Lenca traditional religion and Catholicism. The pilgrims marched into Tegucigalpa, not chanting slogans, but singing religious songs, shooting *cohetes* (similar to bottle rockets), and blowing on their conch shells—all traditional means of calling villagers to worship. The organisers had gained the support of a large group of priests, as well as the local Catholic and traditional spiritual leaders of the region. These leaders used scripture, tradition, and their 'pulpits' to frame the pilgrimage as a spiritual responsibility. A counter-movement, including the parish priest and a handful of local leaders, also used religious themes in an attempt to dissuade villagers, but their argument that this 'pilgrimage' for a road, schools, and health care was Communist, anti-church, and anti-Christian failed to resonate with the spiritual beliefs of the majority. In this way, spiritual symbols, practices, and leaders served to mobilise social action. Nearly all villagers agreed with Bernardo Bejarano that 'the fact that we returned home not only safely but also so successfully was because God was with us, he was protecting us and helping us'. This case demonstrates that, for the Lenca, spiritual themes are potentially powerful mobilisers for social change. It also clarifies that they see little or no dichotomy between the sacred and secular: their spirituality clearly influenced their decisions about whether or not to take part in this risky social action.

Spirituality and development

For the Lenca, then, a powerful connection exists between spirituality and development themes. But do these same connections exist for other groups? In order to answer this, I will turn to the small number of published articles which have discussed the connection between spirituality and development.[2]

Health

Recent research clearly demonstrates the link between Southern people's spirituality and their health decisions. Kirby (1993) illustrates the strong influence of Islam and traditional religion on health practices, such as divinations in Ghana. He calls for 'adaptation and dialogue between African traditional beliefs and Western medical institutions'. Omorodion (1993) outlines the powerful relationship between traditional religion, Christianity, and health-belief systems in Nigeria. Rasul (1993) establishes the strong connection between religion and fertility in Bangladesh, and Van Woudenberg (1994) describes how Zimbabwean women's spirituality shapes their coping behaviours and support for those with AIDs.

Interestingly, within the 'North' there is a growing body of literature which argues not only that people's spirituality affects their decisions regarding health, but that spirituality and spiritual practices have a positive effect on health problems such as blood pressure, infertility, and heart disease. Byrd (1988), in a double-blind study of 393 coronary patients, found that those who were prayed for (though they were unaware of it) were five times less likely to require antibiotics and three times less likely to develop fluid on the lungs. Oxman et al. (1995) found that 'deeply religious' subjects were more likely to be alive six months after elective open-heart surgery. Benor (1990) reviewed 131 studies of spiritual healing involving human and non-human subjects and found that 77 of them had statistically significant results. This research calls into question the Western materialistic and scientific perspective on health and strongly suggests that not only should traditional spiritual health practices be respected, but that they may have much to teach 'modern' medicine as well.

Agriculture

Several researchers have described the link between people's spirituality and their agricultural practices. Puntasen (1992) argues that Buddhist spirituality and its conception of the nature of human beings profoundly shapes Thai farmers' agricultural practices. Seur (1992) relates the role of traditional and new religions in Zambia to the people's acceptance of agricultural innovation. Dei (1993) describes the spiritual importance attached by Ghanaian people to the forest, and the impact of this on sustainable forestry. Golding and Saenz de Tejada (1993) argue that three factors, one of them religion, explain the uneven development between towns in western Guatemala.

Social action

It is not difficult to recognise the integral link between spirituality and social action in contemporary social movements around the globe. The Catholic Church, both clergy and laity, has been a leader in social-justice movements in many countries, including El Salvador (Martín-Baró and Sloan 1990) and Brazil (Medina 1991; Macioti 1986; Jacobi 1984; Adriance 1985). Haynes (1995) reviews six recent books which clearly demonstrate how the religious and spiritual beliefs of leaders and citizens shape their national politics in various African nations. Hunt (1992) and Youngblood (1990) argue that Protestant churches in the Philippines were highly influential in the movement to oust Ferdinand Marcos.

This connection is not limited to 'Southern' countries. During the US civil-rights campaign, African-American churches were a source of strength, power, and hope; and they remain important in more recent efforts for community and economic development (Hill 1994). Zald and McCarthy (1994) as well as Yarnold (1991) argue that religious organisations and individuals are central to many political and social movements, including the US sanctuary movement and the Central American peace process. The role of religion and spirituality is not limited to social movements. In nearly every newspaper one will find references to clergy, lay-leaders, and churches feeding the homeless, cleaning up neighbourhoods, and running after-school programmes. The conflicts in Northern Ireland, Palestine, and the Balkans demonstrate that spirituality and religion can be powerful mobilising forces, not only for social movements of justice and healing but also for hatred and violence. All of these studies demonstrate the integral connection between spirituality and social action.

These examples demonstrate that the power of people's spirituality to influence their development-related decisions and actions is not limited to the Lenca. We cannot assume from this limited research that spirituality will be equally influential for all peoples or in all situations, but clearly it is an issue that deserves increased attention. First, spirituality often powerfully shapes development-related decisions and actions both for and against change and, consequently, the failure to explore spirituality's role will result in faulty scholarship and less effective interventions. Second, spirituality is often ignored by development practitioners working for social action or changes in agricultural or health practices. Third, interventions which ignore spirituality, intentionally or unintentionally, affect not only people's

spirituality but also matters such as environment, gender relations, and community interdependence. And, finally, the failure to reflect with people on the role of spirituality in their lives robs them of the opportunity to determine their own values and priorities and is, therefore, anti-developmental.

Development theory and practice avoid spirituality

Given the apparently integral link between spirituality and issues central to development, it would seem reasonable that spirituality should occupy a relatively prominent place in development theory and practice. However, the subject is conspicuously under-represented in development literature and in the policies and programmes of development organisations. Table 1 was created by searching the titles, abstracts, identifiers, subject headings, and class headings for three journals for the years 1982–1998, using the *First Search* bibliographic database.

Table 1: Number of articles with references to the listed keywords, by journal					
	Keywords				
Journals: 1982–1998	Environment	Gender	Population	Spiritual & spirituality	Religion & religious
World Development	83	85	89	0	5
Journal of Development Studies	19	46	38	0	1
Journal of Developing Areas	18	32	43	0	10

Development theory

These well-respected development journals have published dozens of articles and dedicated entire issues to the study of topics such as gender, population, and the environment—matters considered essential to the construction of sound development theory and practice. However, these same journals make only rare reference to the role of spirituality or religion in development. In fact, a search over the last 15 years of articles in *World Development* and *Journal of Development Studies* shows that the rare reference to religion is limited to its role as one of several descriptive categories. In not one of these articles is the relationship between development and religion or spirituality the central theme.[3]

Gender, class, and ethnicity have gained recent legitimacy as influential factors in the decisions and actions of participants in development efforts. Theorists and practitioners have recognised that women, the poorest of the poor, and indigenous or other minority populations have a different perspective on development from those of men, the wealthy, or majority groups, and they have begun to analyse how development efforts can take into account those differences. However, despite the fact that poor populations are often deeply spiritual, and that their spirituality clearly shapes their decisions and actions, development theorists have ignored the topic of spirituality.

In addition to its absence from influential development journals, spirituality is missing in the sub-fields of development literature. Of two such sub-fields in which the absence of spirituality seems most glaring, the first is the Integrated Rural Development literature. In their classic text, Bryant and White state that integrated rural development is founded on the observation that 'rural poverty is a seamless web of interrelated problems, and that projects that address only a single aspect of development are less successful than integrated projects ... ' (1982:158). Bunch's *Two Ears of Corn* (1982) also dedicates a chapter to integrated programmes and argues that 'because needs are usually interrelated, efforts to fulfil the needs must be integrated'. Despite the fact that the goal of integrated rural development was (and is) to address the 'seamless web' of rural development, the role of spirituality, whether as a hindrance or as a support, has been ignored.

Second, given the intimate connection demonstrated between indigenous agriculture and health practices and spirituality, the literature about indigenous knowledge would also seem a logical place to find discussions relating to the connection between spirituality and development. Indigenous knowledge has been defined by Chandler as 'the accumulated experience of traditional people' (1991:60). Brokensha et al. state that to incorporate indigenous knowledge in developmental planning 'is a courtesy to the people concerned; [...] an essential first step to successful development; emphasises human needs and resources [and] preserves valuable local knowledge' (1980:8). Chambers (1983) argues eloquently as follows:

> For originators and bearers of modern scientific knowledge,
> it requires a major effort to recognise that rural people's knowledge
> exists at all, let alone to see that it is often superior. The arrogance
> of ignorant educated outsiders is part of the problem. (p. 98)

Chambers, the Brokensha volume, and the indigenous-knowledge literature which followed in their wake make a persuasive argument for recognising the power and wisdom of indigenous knowledge. However, despite the power of spirituality in shaping indigenous agriculture, health, and environmental beliefs and practices, and its centrality to many people's decisions and actions, the topic receives little more than fleeting attention. As a result, little is known about the role of spirituality in the development process, and little or no guidance is given to development practitioners on how to address spiritual issues, which results in less effective and even damaging development efforts.

Development practice

Whether for lack of theory and models or as a result of other limitations, development practitioners have also avoided addressing the issue of spirituality and development in their policies and programmes. I surveyed several of the largest development organisations to determine their policies toward spirituality and other issues. While all of the agencies cited below had extensive policies and programme guidelines for dealing with sensitive topics such as gender, indigenous peoples, and the environment, none had developed any written policy regarding religion and spirituality. In fact, for reasons that I will explore briefly in the next section, it was very difficult to extract any written statement from these organisations which conveyed their treatment of these issues. While they were quite candid informally, I believe their more carefully worded official statements convey the fact that these organisations make a concerted effort to avoid the topic of spirituality in their programmes.

The US Agency for International Development (USAID), one of the world's most influential donors, states that 'it is USAID policy not to finance activities with a significant religious/proselytising purpose or content. USAID will not finance the costs of an activity which involves the propagation of religious beliefs or opinions.'[4] CARE, one of the largest US development NGOs, declares that 'CARE is non-sectarian, and discussing spiritual or religious beliefs is not part of its programmes'.[5] CARE's Canadian office stated that 'CARE does not have a "policy" on spirituality. We respect the importance of spirituality for the people with whom we work in the developing world, but it does not form part of our programming. We concentrate on the physical and social well-being of communities.'[6] Catholic Relief Services (CRS), an NGO directly controlled by the US Catholic Church, states that ' ...

discussions about the religious beliefs and practices of staff or programme participants are not part of CRS' programming efforts'.[7]

While many may applaud the restraint shown by these organisations in avoiding a potentially divisive topic and refusing to impose their beliefs through their programmes, the reality is more complex. First, these organisations demonstrate no fear of discussing equally sensitive topics, such as land reform or violence against women, when they believe that to do so is necessary for the development process. In fact, many organisations *require* their programme staff to address potentially conflictual topics such as gender, class, and environment. Their avoidance of spirituality also results in a failure to explore the 'seamless web' of community problems and potential solutions – a failure which ultimately results in less open dialogue and inferior programmes. Finally, such spirituality-avoiding programmes weaken the capacity of individuals and communities to determine their own values and priorities. They fail fully to understand the people whom they wish to help and they also devalue the very thing which may give people the strength and hope they need to participate in risky development activities.

Why is spirituality absent from development theory and practice?

The following section is an attempt to explain the avoidance, in theory and in practice, of a topic which powerfully shapes and is shaped by development efforts. While these explanations are neither inclusive nor definitive, they provide a starting point for further research and discussion. Until it is clear why the topic is avoided, spirituality will not receive the attention it merits.

One possible explanation is the fear of imposing or appearing to impose an outsider's perspective (religious or scientific/materialistic). Many examples exist of religious organisations that have used 'development' programmes in an attempt to manipulate and impose their perspective on their 'beneficiaries'. As a result, both non-religious and religious researchers and practitioners may avoid the topic entirely, so as to avoid any perceived imposition.

Individuals with a 'scientific/materialistic' perspective may be equally wary of openly discussing spirituality. Social-science literature historically has tended to refer to spirituality and religions as belief systems based on myths, whose overall negative effect on society would be replaced eventually by sound scientific thinking. Marx, in 1844,

argued that religion was 'the opium of the people' (1959: 263). Freud (1949: 42, 74) believed religion to be nothing more than an 'infantile' response and 'the adult's reaction to his own sense of helplessness'. Weber argued that religion and ideology could give birth to, or at least shape, broad development trends such as the growth of capitalism; however, these remained largely *post hoc* descriptive variables which allowed for very little intervention.

While many contemporary development theorists and practitioners continue to hold this 'scientific/materialistic bias', they may avoid the topic of spirituality more from a 'respect' for local culture and out of an awareness of the dangers of imposing their view. Although these concerns are valid, there is a certain degree of condescension implicit in withholding what one believes to be a superior understanding of reality so as not to offend or impose. People's spirituality is viewed as weak and to be protected, in the way that quaint traditions should be protected, but with the silent conviction that science and development ultimately will allow people to leave behind their spiritual and 'unscientific' beliefs.

This perspective creates at least two problems. First, these biases clearly influence the researcher's and practitioner's attitude toward practices such as the *compostura* or prayers for healing. However, because these biases are seldom verbalised, they can be neither discussed nor evaluated by those who are being 'respected'. As a result, neither the scientific nor the spiritual thinker has an opportunity to reflect on and learn from their own and the other's perspectives. Second, as demonstrated above, the fact that development practitioners 'respectfully avoid' people's spirituality does not leave it unchanged, but instead can result in the blind adoption of a more scientific/materialistic perspective in such areas as agriculture, health, and social action. If the participants were given space to reflect on their spirituality and the 'science of development', they could explore how these conflict, co-exist, and complement each other and could thus determine for themselves what beliefs to accept. In summary, the practitioner's scientific/materialistic bias, coupled with a 'respect' for religion which effectively sidelines the topic, results in an imposition of values just as serious as that of men over women or the wealthy over the poor. To ignore that effect is not development.

The failure to engage with the issue of spirituality may also be the result of a mostly Northern perspective which dichotomises the sacred and the secular. This dichotomising perspective views decisions about

who should treat a sick child, when and how to plant fields, and whether or not to participate in risky but potentially beneficial social action as secular and not spiritual matters. People's beliefs about the sacred, such as a belief in the 'Divine', or in the power of prayer, are private and personal matters which make many 'Northerners' uncomfortable when aired publicly. The dichotomising of the sacred and secular in Northern society may contribute to the avoidance of spirituality in development theory and practice, not only because of personal discomfort but because researchers and development agencies wish to avoid any charge that they have improperly used funds for the promotion of religion.

A third motivation for avoiding the topic of spirituality, which is inherent in the first two, is the fear of conflict. The continuing conflicts in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and the Balkans are daily reminders of how the manipulation of spiritual and religious themes and symbols can kindle distrust and hatred. The attempts by individuals and groups throughout history to impose their spiritual beliefs or standards on others have resulted in cruel conflicts. One apparently safe response is to avoid the sensitive topic. Unfortunately, such a response does not allow us to avoid the conflict. In academic or practical discourse regarding gender, the environment, and ethnicity, difference of opinion and conflict are viewed not only as acceptable but as necessary and healthy; however, the taboo against discussing religious perspectives effectively removes spirituality from such a dialogue. In the context of this pervasive silence, academics and practitioners can precipitate changes in people's spirituality and subsequently in their whole way of life without the participants' awareness or consent. In some cases these changes will lead to conflict, which may be heightened by the failure to inform or consult those affected by the change. It is only through dialogue that people can come to a better understanding of how spirituality shapes their lives and decisions, how it can affect and be affected by different development paths, and how they can make informed decisions about which path will best serve them.

The lack of precedent and of models for addressing spirituality may be one final reason why the topic is ignored in development literature and practice. While some academics may be interested in pursuing the issue, its absence in the literature may convince some that spirituality is not a legitimate research topic, or that they will risk professional disfavour by pursuing it. Similarly, the lack of models and theory may

persuade practitioners that the topic is either inappropriate or that their attempts to address the topic might cause conflict with supervisors, funders, or participants. Given its pervasiveness, power, and influence, increased attention to spirituality will result in more insightful research and more effective programmes.

The continued avoidance of this topic—whether due to a fear of imposing foreign perspectives, a dichotomising Northern perspective, a fear of conflict, or the lack of precedent or models—is unacceptable. Without increased attention to spirituality, development efforts will fail in their attempts to sidestep an issue which permeates life in the South, will fail to avoid the conflicts which result, and will fail to learn about and encourage people to tap into a potentially powerful source of strength and hope.

Conclusion

I have tried to show, first, that people's spirituality is integrally interconnected with the decisions that they make regarding their development, and that development interventions often change people's spirituality and society without encouraging reflection upon or gaining consent to those changes. Second, I have tried to show that development literature and development practices have systematically avoided the topic of spirituality, despite its significance. Third, I have proffered possible explanations for an avoidance that must be recognised and overcome before spirituality will be accepted as a legitimate topic for research and practice. In conclusion, I would like to offer some suggestions on how spirituality can be addressed in development theory and practice. They do not comprise a full research or development methodology, but may prompt further reflection.

Perhaps the indigenous-knowledge literature has done the most to legitimatise local knowledge about agriculture, health, and the environment. Development academics and practitioners now recognise that, while they may have information that is valuable to local people, the 'experts' also have much to learn from indigenous knowledge. This mutuality manifests itself as respect and must form the basis of discussions of spirituality. The purpose of integrating 'indigenous' spirituality into development is neither to impose outside 'knowledge' nor to manipulate it as a means to the outsider's ends, but rather for mutual reflection and learning.

The indigenous-knowledge process includes three steps which seem appropriate for exploring spiritual as well as agricultural topics.

First, the outsider attempts to learn and understand the local knowledge system as best s/he can. This is done through discussion of local beliefs, observation, and participation in local practices. Second, opportunities must be created for local residents to reflect on their individual and communal goals, and how their practices and beliefs as well as new alternatives may hinder or assist in accomplishing them. Finally, the people themselves must decide on their goals, how they are going to achieve them, what outside assistance they may need, and the role of their traditions in the process.

Applying this process to the role of spirituality in development may appear more ethically hazardous than applying it to agricultural beliefs and practices. The role of the outsider seems especially sensitive. First of all, just as researching and working with indigenous knowledge in agriculture requires training, expertise, and a true respect for local knowledge, the same would be expected in the area of spirituality. However, the question remains as to what sort of training and expertise would be appropriate for this topic, and how true respect is to be tested.

Second, I would argue that both researchers and practitioners need to disclose their biases regarding the topics on which they are working, whether scientific, political, or spiritual. This must be done in a manner which opens and invites discussion; only then can others make truly informed decisions about the findings and suggestions offered. The beliefs of the outsiders, including those which are implicit, shape and change participants' views on topics such as the effectiveness of prayer to heal, or of *composturas* to bring good harvests. Development practitioners are usually willing to impose or strongly advocate a more 'scientific' belief system instead of a more 'spiritual' one, but are seldom willing to use those terms or explain why they believe as they do. Finally, researchers and practitioners must remind themselves of the integral connection between spirituality and all of life for many participants in development programmes. Changes in their farming or their health-care system change their spiritual beliefs and practices. In conclusion, if development is truly about strengthening people's capacity to determine their own values and priorities, and to organise themselves to act on these, then researchers and practitioners must recognise the importance of spirituality in people's lives, seek to understand it better, address it openly, and give people the opportunity and the power to decide how both their development and their spirituality will and should shape each other.

Notes

1 I have placed 'South' in quotation marks in this first reference, because I recognise the term is contested on many fronts. While I am sympathetic to many of the arguments, I employ it here, since I believe it is the least confusing of several options.

2 It is important to note, however, that there is very little published on this subject, and hardly any of the following citations come from development journals.

3 Between 1982 and 1996, the only article in the three journals surveyed that might fit this category was on the role of magic and witchcraft in development, and was published in *World Development*. In 1980, *World Development* dedicated an entire issue to the topic of religion and development, but this did not translate into sustained attention to the topic.

4 M. Q. Newton, Registrar, Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation, USAID, 24 March 1997 (personal communication).

5 S. Ross, Deputy Regional Director for Latin America, CARE USA, 19 April 1997 (personal communication).

6 H. Rourke, Communications Department, CARE Canada, 25 February 1997 (personal communication).

7 D. Rogers, Executive Public Policy Liaison, Catholic Relief Services, 9 May 1997 (personal communication).

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