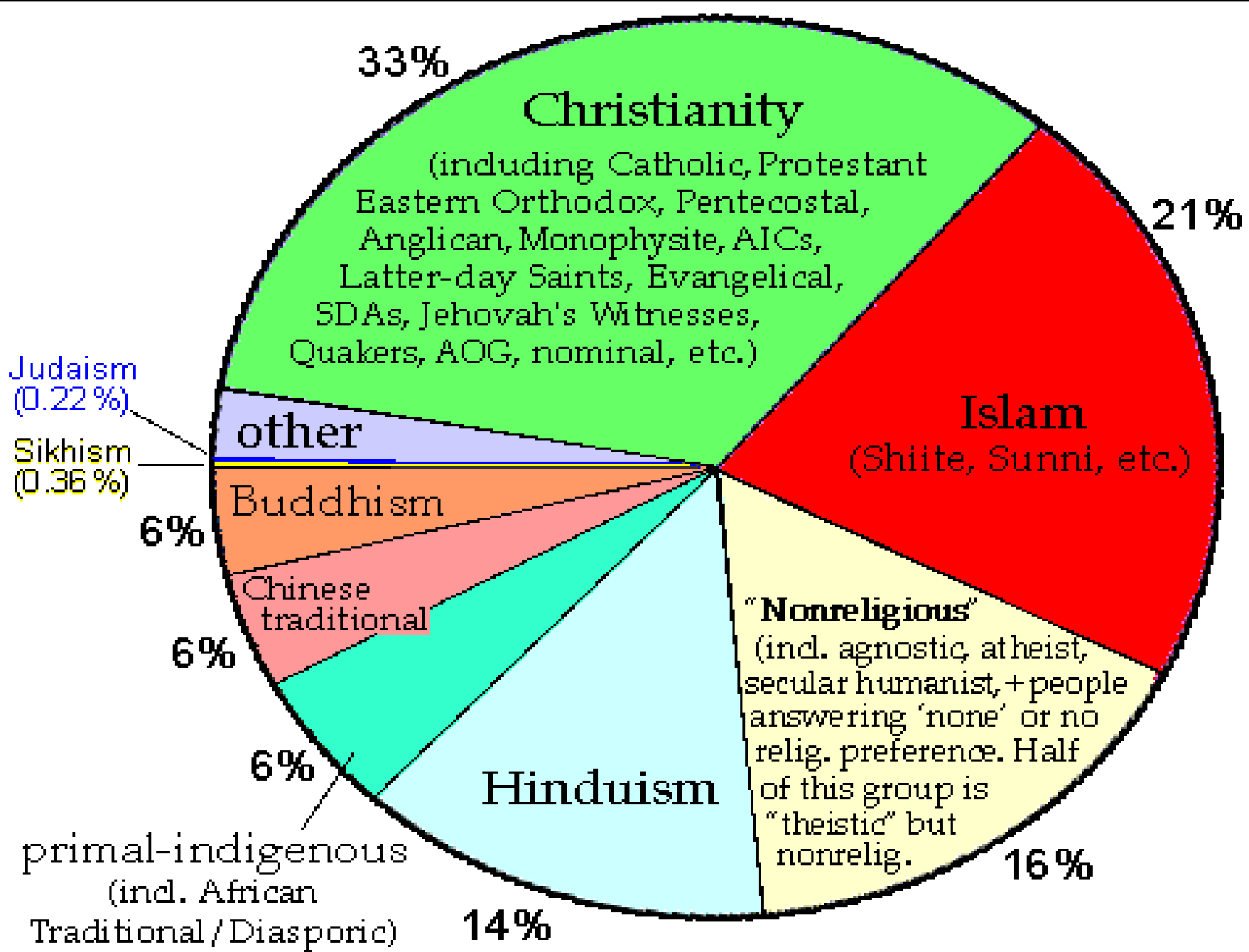# Religious Foundations of Responsibility to the World's Poor
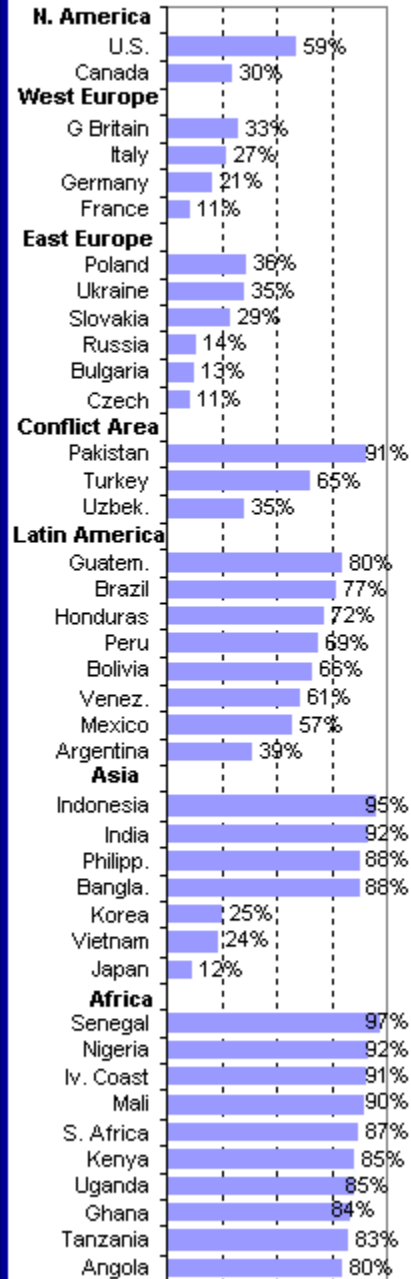
Ethics and Global Development

Questions for this session:

- How have different religious traditions looked at the problems of poverty and equity?

- What is the significance of both common ground and differences, among faith traditions and with secular worlds, for contemporary challenges?

33%

Christianity
(including Catholic, Protestant
Eastern Orthodox, Pentecostal,
Anglican, Monophysite, AICs,
Latter-day Saints, Evangelical,
SDAs, Jehovah's Witnesses,
Quakers, AOG, nominal, etc.)

21%

Islam
(Shiite, Sunni, etc.)

Judaism
(0.22 %)

Sikhism
(0.36 %)

other

6%

Buddhism

Chinese
traditional

6%

6%

primal-indigenous
(incl. African
Traditional / Diasporic)

Hinduism

14%

"Nonreligious"
(incl. agnostic, atheist,
secular humanist, + people
answering 'none' or no
relig. preference. Half
of this group is
"theistic" but
nonrelig.

16%

NOTE: Total adds up to more than 100% due to rounding and because upper bound
estimates were used for each group.

Religion Very Important

Region / Country	%
N. America	
U.S.	59%
Canada	30%
West Europe	
G Britain	33%
Italy	27%
Germany	21%
France	11%
East Europe	
Poland	36%
Ukraine	35%
Slovakia	29%
Russia	14%
Bulgaria	13%
Czech	11%
Conflict Area	
Pakistan	91%
Turkey	65%
Uzbek.	35%
Latin America	
Guatem.	80%
Brazil	77%
Honduras	72%
Peru	69%
Bolivia	66%
Venez.	61%
Mexico	57%
Argentina	39%
Asia	
Indonesia	95%
India	92%
Philipp.	88%
Bangla.	88%
Korea	25%
Vietnam	24%
Japan	12%
Africa	
Senegal	97%
Nigeria	92%
Iv. Coast	91%
Mali	90%
S. Africa	87%
Kenya	85%
Uganda	85%
Ghana	84%
Tanzania	83%
Angola	80%

Pew Forum Survey,2003
Views on
Religion,
Politics,
and Public Policy

Poverty in History

- **Vast majority of people were poor over history: short lives, limited education, health challenges, poor nutrition, limited possessions, limited mobility**
- **There was an assumption that poverty was a normal, permanent condition**
- **Religious traditions brought differing perspectives to the issues; some were deeply imbued with compassion, others less so**
- **They were also in practice deeply involved, in normal times and in crises, in addressing issues of poor in community**

Religious Traditions and Poverty

- **Approaches to the poor are embedded in many religious traditions**
- **Explanations of why some were rich, why others were poor**
- **Requirements on rich: tithing, Zakat**
- **Care for the poor by individuals, orders**
- **Responsibility for those within or outside the community? Treatment of strangers**
- **Attitudes towards work involved**
- **Fine distinctions: the "deserving" poor**

Christianity: Much recent reflection on traditions and teachings about poverty

- **2000+ references in the New Testament to poverty**
- **Parables and teachings plus church history**
- **Ambiguity about wealth, social structures and status**
- **The Parable of the Good Samaritan: ancient wisdom: the stranger, ask no questions; warmth, support and healing; get him back on his feet, fully integrated in life**

Judaism

- **Obligations and Law deeply embedded**
- **Compassion for those who could not help themselves**
- **Care of strangers, linked to desert conditions of Middle East**
- **Charity and almsgiving**
- **Jubilee traditions**

Maimonides (1135-1204): 8 Ways of Giving (each progressively more commendable)

1) giving sadly;

2) giving less than needed, but gladly;

3) giving after being asked;

4) giving without being asked;

5) giving without knowing who the recipient is;

6) giving without the recipient knowing who gave;

7) giving with neither the recipient or giver knowing who the other is;

8) helping the poor establish their independence by loan, hiring them to work, or teaching them a trade.

Islam

- **The basic principles of sharing**
- **Third pillar of Islam is the giving of alms (Zakat)**
- **Sincere spirit of generosity is called for**
- **Islamic finance: basic principle of investing, sharing benefits and losses**
- **Ideals of poverty in some parts of Moslem world (sufi orders)**

Other Faith Traditions

- **Buddhism: core value of compassion and loving kindness**
- **Recognition that abject poverty undermines them**
- **Complex traditions on reincarnation in some faiths**
- **Traditions on slavery**
- **Role of women**

"Modern Realities"

- **Phenomenal changes in past 200 years**
- **Population, wealth, educational attainment**
- **Three modern realities**
- **Very different structures and significance of wealth and poverty**
- **Huge potential for change**
- **Huge challenges of poverty remain: 1.1 billion under $1 a day (one fifth of the world's population); 2.7 billion less than $2 a day; 8,000 die each day of HIV/AIDS, 30,000 children die each day**
- **The Millennium Development Goals: origins and significance**
- **HIV/AIDS a microcosm of scandal of poverty**

Modern Challenges

- **Bono: Fight "Stupid poverty"**
- **Africa: shall we stand around when there is a brush fire with watering cans?**
- **Give a man (or woman) a fishing pole, teach them to fish, and teach them to sell fish**
- **Our generation can be the first to end poverty**
- **The One Campaign, Jubilee, the Year of development**
- **It's about mobilization, about action, and about a long-lasting marathon**

"Modern Wisdom": How are religious traditions addressing these issues?

- **Experience of the World Faiths Development Dialogue: Effort to define common ground in concern about poverty, among faiths and with secular development institutions**
- **Much common ground (Hans Kung)**
- **Major roles of faith institutions in mobilization for social justice: civil rights, apartheid, Jubilee 2000, 2005 Year of Development**
- **Significant tensions to overcome ("Lead us not into Temptation"**

Faith Institutions and Global Poverty

- **Major and understated role in social action: health, education, social safety nets, disaster relief, conflict situations**
- **Practical advocates**
- **Expressing voices of poor communities**
- **Catholic Social teaching, preferential option for the poor**
- **Human Dignity and God-given potential**
- **Helping to deal with complexities**

Faith Institutions and Poverty

- **Many different forms:**
- **Churches, mosques, temples**
- **Church communities**
- **Faith NGOs**
- **Movements Orders (major roles in education, HIV/AIDS)**
- **Interfaith organizations: WCRP, URI, World Parliament of the Religions, Sant'Egidio "Prayer for Peace"**

Potential for Action is Enormous

- **Faith leadership**
- **Advocacy and pressure**
- **Finance: ICCR, 3iG**
- **Micah Challenge and MDGs**
- **Islamic Charities**
- **Buddhism in rebuilding of Cambodia**
- **Tsunami and New Orleans: prominent role of faiths**
- **New alliances across traditional barriers: trafficking of women, Sudan**

Complexities

- **Niger story: Education as a priority, 170 in a class**
- **First, nations and communities left behind**
- **Second, internal conflicts**
- **Third, implementation implementation**
- **Fourth, poverty and equity**

Where to?

- **Reinforce the Aspects of Common cause and engagement**

- **Dialogue on differences**

- **New forms of partnership**

- **New forms of alliance**

- **Common commitment to changing realities**

Areas of Engagement and Alliance

- **Major issue of HIV/AIDS**
- **Human rights: more complex – human rights and responsibilities**
- **Peace building, peace making, conflict prevention**
- **Issues: Debt, religiously motivated violence, water, refugees**
- **City focus**
- **Different geometries: Sant'Egidio: poverty to conflict to HIV/AIDS, to rights**

Issues and Ideas

- Development agenda of advocacy, action, and learning: the MDGs
- Development Agenda: reflective – directions, future shape of societies, "different worlds"
- "Successes" and Failures: culture and religion
- Holes in knowledge, areas for investigation. Data
- Address fundamentalism (or development in deeply religious environments)

Common Concerns

- **Every issue on Development agenda has faith dimensions:**
- **Water, finance (infatuation with micro credit), migration, gender, labor**
- **Every issue on Faith agenda has a development dimension?**
- **Religious freedom, concepts of charity and community. Less tendency to organize in "sectors" but nonetheless many common threads.**

Common Concerns: HIV/AIDS

- A Case: "Part of the Problem, Part of the Solution"
- Sin and Stigma, divisions in approach
- Compassion and care: children and orphans
- Community organizations
- Issues of trust and processes
- Unease about relations with governments and
- Vice versa
- Critically important, critically complex, large holes in knowledge

Areas for dialogue

- **Gender: roles, violence, rights**
- **Corruption**
- **New forms of collaboration and partnerships**
- **Globalization**
- **Enterprise and its roles**
- **Equity and approaches to it**

Martin Luther King Jr.

I look forward confidently to the day when all who work for a living will be one with no thought to their separateness as Negroes, Jews, Italians or any other distinctions. This will be the day when we bring into full realization the American dream -- a dream yet unfulfilled.

- A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men will not take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few; a dream of a land where men will not argue that the color of a man's skin determines the content of his character;

- **a dream of a nation where all our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone, but as instruments of service for the rest of humanity; the dream of a country where every man will respect the dignity and worth of the human personality.**