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EXPLORING THE WORLDVIEW OF RELIGIOUS SISTERS:

A COMPARATIVE EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF ALTRUISTIC/VOLUNTARISTIC ATTITUDES

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Introduction

Religious Sisters within the Roman Catholic Church (sometimes referred to as "Women Religious" or simply "Nuns"[1]) are involved in fundamental economic and social development, human rights, and anti-slavery/anti-human trafficking work around the world, as well as driving essentially feminist and economic equality agendas within the wider the populations and communities in which they live. Much of the work carried out by these Religious Sisters resembles that of non-sectarian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). But, unlike most NGOs, the Religious Sisters tend *not* to: work to a specific job description, produce annual reports, release the results of monitoring and evaluation, prepare grant proposals setting "key performance indicators" for their programs, and only rarely attend conferences of the NGO community operating within the same social change/human rights milieu.

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[1] Non-Catholics often refer to all Catholic Women Religious as "Nuns," but, in fact, Nuns are just those who live secluded in a cloister or nunnery, while a "Religious Sister" works in the wider world.

There are also essential differences between Religious Sisters and non-sectarian development and aid workers in their mode of working, their level of involvement and commitment, and in their psychological (they might say "spiritual") orientation to their work. In a previous research study, we sought to elucidate the work-lives and skills that typify the day-to-day existence of Religious Sisters, and through them, give us a better understanding of their relatively undocumented and unanalyzed orientations and work practices. In that work, we sought to decipher the "skillset" of Religious Sisters.[2] In this study, we explore attitudinal differences between Religious Sisters and a larger population of charity supporters. To do so we must first review the findings of the previous study.

Unlike the process that might lead to a job in social or economic development or a caring profession, Religious Sisters face no formal skills assessment or required training, except for one key expectation - that a Sister will "have a vocation." For the Religious Sisters, and within the wider active structures of the Roman Catholic Church, having a *vocation* means "to be called by God to service." No other characteristic or skill is sufficient to enable a person who does not have a vocation, who has not been called by God, to become a Religious Sister. A central and definitive requirement is that whatever skillsets, training, or personal characteristics a woman might have, these personal skills can only be mobilized through a vocation, which means being personally called by God to service.

Vocation[3] is a deep commitment, arrived at through prayer and discernment. One's vocation is recognized through a process guided by knowledgeable people who also have a vocation. This may be a priest, a Religious Sister, sometimes a vocations director. The expectation is that if a woman is called to religious life, she will have an

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[2] Bidisha Saikia & Kevin Bales, *Monitoring and Measuring the Ineffable: Religious Sisters and the* Adavasi *Peoples in Assam*, 6 INT'L J. ASIAN CHRISTIANITY (forthcoming, 2023).

[3] "Vocation" also has a definition in Canon Law, as well as broad meaning reflecting a formal commitment to a way of life, following certain norms which have juridical status within the Catholic Church.

ineluctable impulse toward the commitment of vocation. If her religious guides agree, they will confirm she is, indeed, called. Religious Sisters don't refer to this process as "recruitment," and significant differences between the work of Religious Sisters and other voluntary sector workers begin at this point.

Religious Sisters are not hired according to a set job description. A "normal" hiring and employment process involves matching skillsets to required tasks, and how the job candidate conveys how their motivations and goals might match that of the organization they wish to join. In contrast, the acceptance of a vocation by a new Religious Sister is more a surrender of self, an extinguishing of ego in service to others. While conventional workers exchange their time, energy, and efforts for remuneration and, hopefully, some level of job satisfaction, Religious Sisters actively give away not just a 40-hour-per-week segment of their lives, but their entire lives - offering them to be used in whatever way is decided by their Congregation. This is a profound and alternative economic, social, psychological, and fundamentally political, orientation to human existence. For the Religious Sister, it is both a diminution of self and an aggrandizement of the soul as part of a larger, eternal, effort.

We argue that this is a significant alternative psychological orientation, and that while it has been examined in its outward and functional attributes, is not well understood as a psychological orientation as compared to the attitudes held by other segments of the population, particularly and notably amongst other groups and individuals that are engaged in charitable and development work. Our aim in this study is to uncover and elucidate the differences in attitude, orientation and approach that may exist, and to do so through an empirical comparative exercise using a tested and validated scale that measures, broadly, the attitudes of voluntarism and altruism.

The unique vocational orientation of Religious Sisters requires renouncing – an emptying of oneself – and making the decision to engage in a life of service to others. It is altruism personified and requires forgoing life as it is normally expressed – through work, family, procreation, pursuits and hobbies, political or social engagement, and so

on. The expectation is that the Religious Sister will have no self-serving element to her work – which is somewhat paradoxical in that self-sacrifice is also seen as a positive attribute within the larger community of Religious Sisters. Taking up a vocation also means a lifetime of subsistence support. Food, clothing, and shelter are provided to Religious Sisters, though with the understanding that subsistence may be minimal. Likewise, the Religious Sister will be expected to work at any or all needed jobs within their community – cooking, sewing, cleaning, building, gardening, bookkeeping, any work that may be necessary to support the material life or charitable work of the Sisters in their local House (where a group of Sisters live together) or the larger Congregation (the overarching community of Sisters).

In our previous work, we showed how Religious Sisters build a set of skills upon a foundation of altruistic sacrifice. Our ethnographic study identified key philosophical and intellectual themes that are manifested through service. These are the key "skills" of Religious Sisters. Some skills are *orientational,* meaning that they are agreed and shared values or intellectual methodologies concerning how work is to be done. Other skills are *functional*, particular sets of activities that make up the core of the vocation. Drawing upon and, at times, quoting from our previous work, as well as using the terms and explanations given by Religious Sisters, we note these specific skills to be:

> **Vocation** – as discussed above, this is an orientational decision and commitment to the *vocation*, a calling to give your whole life away, to dedicate your life to service. This is the foundational step leading to the separated life of Religious Sisters. It is the transformational moment in which a woman's life is paradoxically lived intensely, wholly, and completely, but in service to others.[4]

[4] For many Catholics, the description of "vocation" as a "skill" will seem odd, when it is more likely to be considered a gift, especially when it is clearly a religious vocation.

Being "Pure at Heart" – is understood as the active orientation of altruism, it is a *discipline that rejects any self-serving component* in the actions of service, among the Sisters this is often referred to as being "pure at heart."[5]

Adherence to a Set and Shared Moral Structure – is both an orientational and functional skill. This is the *foundational code*, a program that explains the goals and means to achieve those goals, setting out behavioral and intellectual expectations. Knowledge of, and adherence to, this code creates the boundaries of what is, and what is not, appropriate action and thought. There is also a Code of Canon Law setting out how religious orders should be managed, processes for admission, and so forth. Parallel to this are rules and expectations specific to any specific Congregation of Religious Sisters. In their day-to-day life there are shared expectations and moral boundaries that are taught, practiced, and agreed by the members of a Congregation. Altogether, these make up a shared moral structure that guides most behaviors and answers most questions or dilemmas.

A Focus on Justice and Mercy – is an orientational, interpretive, and functional skill – a specific commitment to the paired concepts of *justice and mercy.*[6] As an *orientation*, it is used to *interpret* when justice and mercy are being violated or need to

[5] The key Biblical source for "pure at heart" is Matthew 5:8. It is one of the "beatitudes," attributed to Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount. The full text is: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is interpreted as being deeply focused, without earthly distraction, and loving in thought and action, as well as avoiding those mental states or inclinations that are "impure" – lust, greed, selfishness, anger, and so forth.

[6] These two concepts also derive from the Beatitudes (sometimes referred to as "The Sermon on the Mount") (Matthew 5: 6-7). In "plain English," these may be read as: "Blessed are those who want more for this world, who want justice and mercy and kindness and truth in this world. Blessed are those who are not eager to condemn the people of this world, who assume the best, seek to understand and are quick to forgive."

be exercised. This is not always easy, life can be complex, and drivers and actions may seem contradictory. This requires analyzing social situations that can be addressed through the conscious practice or promotion of justice and mercy. The *functional* use of this skill is to act in ways that support justice, expressed with mercy. The range of actions to be taken within that aim are potentially infinite, hence the skill needed in their interpretation and functional mobilization.

Empathy – for Religious Sisters *empathy* is a functional tool as well as an orientation. It is the dynamic act of compassion and sympathy, and equally important, it is the functional and active *responsiveness* to individuals and groups that empathy has identified as needing support and care. While an NGO may select a specific constituency of shared need such as those in hunger or those needing healthcare, within the community of Women Religious there is no boundary delineating individuals or groups as "eligible" for care – *except* the criterion of empathetic engagement. Empathy is the way that the Communities of Religious Sisters identify their "target audience(s)" and from there, determine appropriate responses.

Grace or Gentleness – these are also psychological orientations as well as functional behaviors. If a business or NGO has specific ways they want staff to engage the public, these will normally center on expressing a positive attitude, having communications skills, being adaptable, and being good at time management. For the Religious Sister, *grace* is an orientation to the public. Their response to a constituency of need, and to the wider community, is the active expression of *grace*: a gentleness of spirit and action. This is a theological and philosophical orientation that describes an inner peace, a reverence, and a pervasive hospitality to others. These orientations are pathways to action – grace, empathy, focusing on justice and mercy, adhering to the wider moral structure, and being pure

at heart – come into play within the key and deliberate act of *accompaniment*.

Accompaniment – if there is a methodology of response and action that encapsulates the work of Women Religious, it is *accompaniment*. When offering an explanation of how they orient their work or how achieve their goals, Women Religious return again and again to the concept of accompaniment. Accompaniment rolls together the practices of empathy and grace, and the strategic direction of justice and mercy. It is also a method of intelligence gathering, learning, communication, and the entering into trust with their chosen constituency of need. It means, literally, moving into the immediate physical space, work, and lives of that constituency – sharing virtually all daily acts of domestic and economic life. It is an entry into the lives of others that is empathetic, whole, and persistent.[7] Children, the elderly, and the unwell are cared for, food is cooked and shared, when night brings an end to the struggle for subsistence, the Sisters sleep nearby and wake early to begin again their accompaniment. If young people are working in factories or fields, Sisters accompany them there in order to understand the benefits and dangers of their work, and to help those they accompany to see alternatives, or remind employers of their responsibilities for worker safety. As they get to know those they accompany, Sisters may help them toward a training program, medical care, basic education, or the forming of a village credit union, as well as sharing theological and spiritual messages and practices. These examples describe accompaniment in the developing world, but Sisters accompany others in their work and lives in many other ways. If there is a common theme, it is that they are accompanying people whose lives are lived in poverty, deprivation, and social exclusion, whose

[7] The Women Religious sometimes describe this in theological terms, that for a Christian, being alongside others in authentic charity (caritas/love/agape/self-gift) is the very fulfilment of the core commandment to love God and love others.

> work is poorly paid, and often dirty and dangerous. Accompaniment also takes Sisters into the shadowy world of criminal businesses, from children enslaved in public begging, to women and children enslaved in commercial sexual exploitation. Given the mental, spiritual, and physical demands experienced when practicing accompaniment, it is not surprising that Women Religious often relate that one specific attribute is crucial – *stamina*.

Clearly, accompaniment can be directed toward and achieve many different outcomes – but a common, and intentional, result is trust. Living closely with a community, and doing so continuously and committedly, means that Sisters, however they are first received, come to be seen as human, trustworthy, and supportive. For culturally or politically suppressed communities, that have suffered generations of discrimination, who have come to distrust all institutions of government, including local landowners and businessmen, these outsiders who actively take on their burdens and ask little of them are a revelation. Over time, suspicion and disbelief are replaced by trust and interest. And from that breakthrough can come community organizing, education, and change.

But what are the underlying attitudes that support this dedicated life of service – what attitudes are shared within a community of Religious Sisters? And how do their attitudes differ from those of the wider population of those who take part in charitable activities? Is there something different about how they seem both to themselves and the world around them? And how different are Religious Sisters in their judgments and attitudes compared to the wider population? Is it possible that some part of the "secret sauce" nuns bring to their work is attitudinal?

Measuring Voluntarism-Activism-Altruism Attitudes

In the late 1990s, one of the authors of this research was involved in attitudinal measurement on a large scale in Great Britain.

Some of that work included regularly contacting large random samples of the U.K. population, or specific sub-sets of the U.K. population. One key question of that time concerned what constellation of attitudes and behaviors translated into specific voluntaristic charitable actions or political activity. A sub-set of those questions concerned "'longevity" or "adherence" to an ideological or charitable commitment or set of attitudes. Such voluntaristic orientations came under special scrutiny when several significant and disastrous events in the developing world (famine; civil war; epidemics) generated large-scale public responses. Such sizable responses were welcome, but what was less helpful was the pattern of extremely high levels of public positive response being extremely short-lived. Very large parts of the U.K. population would donate funds to address a specific need or "volunteer" for specific activities, but then fade quickly away, perhaps to temporarily address a different emergency need. That said, within these large numbers of people making a temporary but positive response, were a smaller number who were inclined to commit support for a much longer period – the sort of supporters any charity or non-governmental organization would hope for and seek to cultivate and nurture.

As expressed in the original study: "In order to gain from the contribution in time and energy that volunteers offer, volunteers must be located, recruited, trained, and motivated, and then retained. But a key attribute of volunteers is that they *volunteer*—they present themselves, though often in response to a recruitment approach or some other motivating event or experience. For that reason they are not particularly easy to locate, nor are those who do present themselves always the best candidates for the volunteer post on offer. … The best volunteers are not just those with needed skills, they are also those with motivation and commitment. When workers are not paid, are not bound by contract, have little thought of advancement, and their effort is not linked to their livelihood, questions of motivation and commitment become vital. The 'earnings package' of the charity volunteer is

almost entirely psychological in nature, 'job satisfaction' is paramount."[8] Note the similarity between Religious Sisters in terms of their orientations noted above, and the most desirable (from the perspective of the charity) sort of charity volunteers.

The research question generated by this phenomenon of retention and/or loss of effective charity volunteers at that time asked: how might the small number of potentially committed supporters be identified among the very large flow of temporary supporters? Qualitative research with individuals and small groups of charity supporters, some long-term, others recently arrived, suggested that there were underlying attitudes that demarcated whether a charity supporter was likely to be engaged for the long term or be ephemeral. This led to further small group discussions yielding results that included indications of an attitudinal orientation. After further analysis, the key research questions were: "is it possible to identify a unified attitude which predisposes people to social activism or volunteering? If there is such an attitude: what are the component dimensions (that is, the key motivations) of this attitude, and what are their relative strengths? Finally, how is it linked to the act of volunteering, and can it be used to predict whether a person will volunteer or be socially active?"[9]

An attitude scale was developed to measure voluntarism-activism. Its format was an adaptation of the basic Thurstone Scaling technique for scale development.[10] Altogether 42 statements or "items" intending to measure dimensions of voluntarism-activism were initially trialed with sub-samples of activists and other charity supporters in order to check for clarity and relevance. This process reduced the number of items to 25 which were then subjected to a test of inter-item correlation as well as item-scale correlation. This was followed by a

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[8] Kevin Bales, *Measuring the Propensity to Volunteer*, 30(3) SOCIAL POLICY & ADMINISTRATION 206, 208 (September 1996).

[9] *Id.* at 213.

[10] L.L. Thurstone, *A method of scaling psychological and educational tests*, 16(7) J. EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY 433 (1925).

factor analysis to examine thematic coherence and leading to the exclusion of some items due to redundance. This yielded a 20 item Voluntarism-Activism Scale.

When administered to a random sample of 1,290 charity supporters the results showed that: Firstly, the propensity to voluntarism-activism was normally distributed across the sample. Secondly, the voluntarism-activism scale was highly and significantly related to the actual level of charitable activity of the respondents. Thirdly, the nature of the attitude of voluntarism-activism was clarified, and four underlying attitudinal dimensions were identified for this sample:

1. A *sense of effectiveness* at the personal level, that the charity supporters felt that they could positively address social problems.

2. A *sense of sociability or generalism* – that volunteering and altruistic work is a normal part of one's life.

3. An *idealism or philosophical commitment* – an orientation to sacrifice and social justice, combined with the knowledge there are no easy solutions.

4. A *"feel good" factor*, a clear positive self-image of oneself as an activist or volunteer, a rewarding sense of satisfaction in that role.

A further correlational finding was that those respondents having higher voluntarism-activism scores had higher levels of volunteering and activity – a significant relationship also confirmed in regression analysis.

Exploring the Voluntarism-Activism of Religious Sisters

We have introduced the Voluntarism-Activism Scale in some detail in order to establish its usefulness in accessing the psychological attitudes and preferences for voluntaristic, activist, and altruistic orientations among Religious Sisters as compared to a general sample of charity volunteers. Our intention is to use the results of the random

sample (n=1,290) of charity supporters as a baseline of public attitudes and orientations against which the attitudes and orientations of Religious Sisters might be compared and analyzed. Specifically, we seek to explore the attitudinal dimensions supporting altruistic, voluntaristic, and active work in addressing human needs through the mechanism of a religious order.

There is a relatively scant literature on the psychological or attitudinal state of Religious Sisters, and these tend to approach the attitudes and mental states of Religious Sisters from several angles. The work of Tomáš Janotík, for example, explores life satisfaction and happiness among a large sample of Benedictine Nuns in Germany.[11] Janotík found that age, health, a sense of autonomy, relatedness, competence, and a sense of meaning were strongly linked to life satisfaction in the Nuns. This suggests that their motivation to live a monastic life is more intrinsic than extrinsic. Compared to a wider representative sample of German women, the Nuns expressed a much higher satisfaction with life. Ariza-Montes *et al.*[12] also examined how the nature of the work of Religious Sisters is important to them, and how that determines how they might flourish in both their work and their personal lives. Their conclusion states that flourishing at work can be improved by work engagement that is moderated by human values. The work of Bigelow *et al.* located age differences in the work orientation of Religious Sisters. Younger nuns appreciated some autonomy in their work; were more likely to value imagination, broad-mindedness, freedom, and friendship; and were more likely to consider their personal growth and development. Older Religious Sisters (typically in their sixties) were likely to be teaching children and less likely to be

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[11] Tomáš Janotík, *Empirical Analysis of Life Satisfaction in Female Benedictine Monasteries in Germany*, 67(1) REVUE ÉCONOMIQUE 143 (2016).

[12] Antonio Ariza-Montes, Horacio Molina-Sánchez, Jesús Ramirez-Sobrino & Gabriele Giorgi, *(2018) Work Engagement and Flourishing at Work Among Nuns: The Moderating Role of Human Values*, 9 FRONTIERS IN PSYCHOLOGY (28 September 2018), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01874.

working independently. Their key orientations were toward responsibility, courage, equality, and salvation.[13]

These previous studies primarily used existing measures of "life satisfaction" and indicators of well-being to examine how Religious Sisters differed from other groups (and sometimes how they differed from each other). Our research takes a somewhat different approach, exploring the attitudes that underlie altruistic and voluntaristic behaviors. While Janotík compared differences in some attitudes between Religious Sisters and a random sample of the general population of German women, we seek comparison that is between groups that are, in a sense, on parallel paths of altruistic behaviors. On one hand, such a comparison is somewhat one of "like with like" – assuming those active in altruistic endeavors are likely to be more alike than comparing groups who do not share such an orientation. On the other hand, one key and significant difference between these two groups is that while the supporter/volunteer group engages in charitable and altruistic behaviors as simply one part of their life, the Religious Sisters spend virtually all of their lives engaged in charitable and altruistic behaviors – lives that our previous research showed extended to twelve- and sixteen-hour days, often seven days a week.[14] Charity volunteers and supporters are giving of some of their time and energy, the Religious Sisters are devoting all of their lives to charitable and altruistic behaviors. How do Religious Sisters who have surrendered their independence and selfhood, who have extinguished ego in service to others, differ in their worldview and orientation to those who live "normal" lives that are still marked by altruism and service? At one level, we seek to identify the unique mindset of the Religious Sister, in the colloquial vernacular of the non-governmental organization sector: what is their "secret sauce"?

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[13] Elizabeth Bigelow, Rachel Fitzgerald, Patricia Busk, Emily Girault & Joan Avis, *Psychological Characteristics of Catholic Sisters: Relationships Between the MBTI and Other Measures*, 14 J. PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE 32 (1988).

[14] Bidisha Saikia & Kevin Bales, *Monitoring and Measuring the Ineffable, supra* note 2.

Our research method hinges upon a comparison between the Religious Sisters and the previous random sample of charity supporters and volunteers. For reference, these are the characteristics of the large previous sample of charity supporters and volunteers:

The characteristics of the sample of charity supporters/volunteers

		Number	Percent
Sex	Male	404	30.4
	Female	930	69.6
Occupation	Professional	136	12.4
	Administrative	52	4.8
	Teacher/nurse	150	13.7
	Clerical	41	3.7
	Skilled workers	62	5.7
	Services	24	2.2
	Manual workers	33	3.0
	Student/unemployed	17	0.9
	Retired	311	28.4
	Other	194	17.7
	No response	76	6.9
Marital Status	Single	449	33.5
	Live together	34	2.5
	Married	708	52.8
	Divorced	62	4.6
	Widowed	78	5.8
	No response	7	0.5

Age	< 18 years	64	4.8
	18-30	242	18.2
	31-40	259	19.4
	41-50	307	22.9
	51-60	179	13.5
	61-70	153	11.5
	71-80	4	0.3
	>80 years	96	7.3
	No response	27	2.0

It is worth pointing out that the sample of charity supporters and volunteers is not a demographic mirror of the larger population in which they live. Their demographic characteristics are similar to those found in other research on charity volunteers: more women than men; respondents more likely to be employed in caring professions than in the wider population, and many more "retired" persons engaged in supporting charitable work. Likewise, this group is older than the general population by a good margin – the fact that seven percent of the sample are over the age of 80 is noteworthy.

We have previously noted that the previous sample of charity supporters and volunteers expressed a patterned set of attitudes that reflected their voluntarism-activism-altruism in four dimensions, these were:

1. A *sense of effectiveness* at the personal level, that they could positively address social problems.
2. A *sense of sociability or generalism* – that volunteering and altruistic work is a normal part of one's life.
3. An *idealism or philosophical commitment* – an orientation to sacrifice and social justice, combined with the knowledge there are no easy solution.

4. A *"feel good" factor*, a clear positive self-image of oneself as an activist or volunteer, a rewarding sense of satisfaction in that role.

For the present inquiry into the attitudes and orientation of Religious Sisters our key research question is *how*, and *in what ways* (if any), Religious Sisters vary in their voluntarism-activism-altruism attitudes when compared to the previous larger sample of charity supporters/volunteers. Put another way, how do the psychological orientations of Religious Sisters who have chosen to offer their whole lives in service to others vary from those who regularly serve others but only as one part of a wider life and existence?

To answer this question, we collected responses to the Voluntarism-Activism Scale from a sample of 76 Religious Sisters, aged between 30 and 60, who were members of the Congregation that was the focus of our ethnographic research among the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (hereafter referred to as MSMHC Sisters) in the State of Assam in India. This is a Congregation that was founded in Assam in the 1940s and has drawn most of its members from the Assamese population. It is also worth noting that the majority of the MSMHC Sisters are *Adivasi,* that is, they are part of the Indigenous Population of India, sometimes referred to by the Indian government as the "scheduled tribes." As such, the highly marginalized *Adivasi* peoples are regularly excluded from governmental support, and are also more vulnerable to such crimes as dispossession of land, forced labor, denial of basic services including health services, and exclusion from education. The *Adivasi* are also barred and separated officially from the "scheduled castes" that represent the sub-sets of the 2,000-year-old *Varna* system within Hindu theology which separates the population into hierarchical occupation-based sub-groups (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya, Shudras, and Harijans). This is important in the current political context of India because the current government presses for *Hindutva* – the establishment of a solely Hindu state, one that separates, excludes, or removes fundamental rights from non-Hindus.

While they exist in this political context, the MSMHC Sisters are also removed from much of the political unrest connected to *Hindutva*. Assam is a rural state, and one that is home to a number of ethnicities. A good deal of the work of the Sisters is with poor, often indebted, agricultural workers on tea plantations, as well as building up schools, healthcare, and pathways to development, especially for women and girls. It is in this context of work in poor rural communities, carried out within a close religious community, that the attitudes of the Sisters are shaped and expressed.

Analysis of the results of the Voluntarism-Activism Scale completed by the Religious Sisters show significant variation from that of the larger charitable community noted above. The charity supporters/volunteers held attitudes that were described by four factors: *sense of effectiveness; a sense of sociability or generalism; an idealism or philosophical commitment;* and a *"feel good" factor.* These four factors were clearly delineated in the statistical analysis. In contrast, the Religious Sisters demonstrated a distinctly, and statistically significant, different interpretation of voluntarism-activism-altruism.

A factor analysis of the responses of the Religious Sisters showed an underlying set of attitudes that were described by three factors, rather than the four of the charity supporters/volunteers. These three factors described a different constellation of concepts to those held by the charity supporters/volunteers. (*See* Appendix 2 for the Factor Loadings for the Religious Sisters). The clusters of statements linked to these three Factors are:

Religious Sisters
Statements in Factor Order with Note of Positive or Negative Response

Factor 1

1f. You can't really change things in your community, that's just the way things are. (+)

1m. Anything I do can't really change the world's problems. (+)

1p. You can't really change the world, that's just the way things are. (+)

2o. When a person gets involved in a cause it just upsets the people they are close to. (+)

Factor 2

1b. A person just has to rely on our leaders to deal with big problems. (+)

1c. Sometimes things happen in your life that *make* you take action. (-)

2h. Most people who get involved in social causes usually have some sort of personal problem. (+)

2j. Taking care of my family takes all the time I've got. (-)

2r. There are some people in the world who just can't be helped. (+)

2t. Speaking up for what you believe in will just get you into trouble. (+)

4l. I'd like to do more for charity, but other things just get in the way. (+)

4q. I know that when I'm working to help others, I'm also helping myself. (-)

4s. I guess I'm just one of those people who has to *do* something when I feel strongly. (-)

Factor 3

2d. People with ordinary lives don't feel the need to get heavily involved in social causes. (+)

3e. Some issues are much more important than my personal life. (+)

3g. There will be peace only when there is justice. (+)

3i. Putting money in a collecting tin isn't enough, you've also got to *act* on your beliefs. (+)

3k. It's not enough to just *talk* about what's wrong—you've got to *do* something. (+)

4a. The more you put into life the more you will get out of it. (+)

These attitudinal orientations are very different to that of the previous sample of charity supporters and volunteers. It is our assertion that this is due to the dramatically different orientations to life and work held by the Religious Sisters. We would describe these differences in a series of five contrasting orientations to life and work on the part of these two groups.

Firstly, is the dichotomy between *humility* vs. *expressiveness.* Where charity supporters express fulfilment and pride about their altruistic engagement, the Religious Sisters tend to a much more humble response. They strongly agree with statements such as "Anything I do can't really change the world's problems" and "You can't really change the world, that's just the way things are." Their locus of control, their center of gravity is not in themselves but in the larger Congregation, its leadership, and its ultimate divine direction. They face adversity and challenge with humility.

Secondly, is the dichotomy between *deference vs. independence.* Volunteer charity supporters act as independent agents and see their charitable work as a unique, independent (if collaborative), personal, and positive act. Religious Sisters, on the other hand, defer to the guidance of their leaders, including their distant but preeminent spiritual leaders. They hold a very positive response to the statement "A person just has to rely on our leaders to deal with big problems." – a statement that was anathema to most charity supporters who see themselves as demonstrating free will and chosen action. For the Religious Sisters, "our leaders" did not mean local or national political figures, but the leadership of their Congregation and beyond them all the way up the hierarchy of the Catholic Church to their ultimate leader and guide, the Pope.

Thirdly, is the dichotomy between *empathy vs. sympathy*. A volunteer supporter of a charity that is addressing disasters, such as famine, will feel great sympathy for those affected – but they are usually unable to truly understand the real horrors of mass starvation. A Religious Sister living in a rural village, accompanying families living

with significant hunger, sharing their burdens and their deprivation will feel empathy, a true and deep understanding. Note that Religious Sisters reacted negatively to the statement "I know that when I'm working to help others, I'm also helping myself." This reflects two factors, their knowledge that their *empathy* is strong but not perfect, and their *humility* - the knowledge that their efforts may come to nothing and are certainly not aimed at their own aggrandizement or credit.

Fourthly, is the dichotomy between *realism vs. intention.* Charity supporters act upon genuinely good *intentions* to change the world for the better. Religious Sisters, living and working deeply immersed in poor and damaged communities, are more realistic about their constituencies of need and their chances of success. The Religious Sisters strongly agreed that: "There are some people in the world who just can't be helped." This is not fatalism, but *realistic humility* in the face of human suffering.

Fifthly, is the dichotomy between *discipline vs. free choice.* Charity supporter/volunteers choose to support an organization or cause, this *choice* is part of their self-definition, their sense of who they are. The Religious Sisters are "called" to a vocation, and their acceptance into their religious order is only partially their decision, and the final decision is not theirs. Religious Sisters act under extensive, sometimes strict, *discipline.* They strongly agree with the statement "A person just has to rely on our leaders to deal with big problems." In some ways, the Religious Sisters resemble soldiers under military discipline, with close adherence to rank and order.

Finally, there is one area of agreement or orientation that is shared by charity supporters/volunteers and the Religious Sisters. This is an area of positive philosophical alignment, a deep expression of what are felt to be fundamental truths. Both groups strongly agree with the assertion that "There will be peace only when there is justice." Both groups strongly agree with the statements that: "The more you put into life the more you will get out of it," "Some issues are much more important than my personal life," and "It's not enough to just *talk* about what's wrong—you've got to *do* something." Both groups are carried along by a strong belief in the ultimate good they seek to support and expand.

Conclusion

Our aim has been to discover the worldview of Religious Sisters. Their phenomenal work ethic, dedication, and often significant results in achieving social change, is recognized but little understood. We have uncovered some of the underpinnings of their collective power of quiet social action. In terms of their psychological and philosophical orientations they act through a series of key attitudes and perspectives: humility, deference, empathy, realism, and discipline – as well as a deep philosophical belief that peace, justice, redemption, and truth are not just possible but real and active. All of us take some chances in our lives, but the Religious Sisters wager their whole lives on these beliefs and the pathway of humility and service that leads to expressing these beliefs through action.

We note that the use of many attitudinal or psychological measures will simply fail to adequately describe the worldview of Religious Sisters. The Sisters' orientation is at a radical angle to that of most "normal" populations. The markers of "success" in most societies are something like a negative mirror image of what Religious Sisters would regard as "success." wealth, prestige, power, notoriety and fame are anathema to the Religious Sisters, indeed, these are more likely to be markers of failure, not just in one's life, but also in one's soul. Much more important is the shared work, based in empathy and discipline that brings nearer their understanding of "God's Kingdom."

We suggest that attitudinal scales, such as the Volunteerism-Activism Scale, have a place in discerning the inner logic and beliefs among populations that engage in work such as peace-building, development, human rights, and environmental preservation – and to understand how their worldviews might differ across populations, political groups, and religious persuasions.

Appendix 1 - The Voluntarism -Activism Scale

This is a Likert Scale – responses to each statement should be coded as: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. For analysis, "negative" items may be reverse coded.

a. The more you put into life the more you will get out of it.
b. A person just has to rely on our leaders to deal with big problems.
c. Sometimes things happen in your life that *make* you take action.
d. People with ordinary lives don't feel the need to get heavily involved in social causes.
e. Some issues are much more important than my personal life.
f. You can't really change things in your community, that's just the way things are.
g. There will be peace only when there is justice.
h. Most people who get involved in social causes usually have some sort of personal problem.
i. Putting money in a collecting tin isn't enough, you've also got to *act* on your beliefs.
j. Taking care of my family takes all the time I've got.
k. It's not enough to just *talk* about what's wrong—you've got to *do* something.
l. I'd like to do more for charity, but other things just get in the way.
m. Anything I do can't really change the world's problems.
n. A person should live simply so that others can simply live.
o. When a person gets involved in a cause it just upsets the people they are close to.
p. You can't really change the world, that's just the way things are.

q. I know that when I'm working to help others, Tm also helping myself.
r. There are some people in the world who just can't be helped.
s. I guess I'm just one of those people who has to *do* something when I feel strongly.
t. Speaking up for what you believe in will just get you into trouble.

Appendix 2 -Factor Loadings for Sample of Religious Sisters

Rotated Factor Loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Uniqueness
var1b	0.3102	0.4914	0.0547	0.6593
var1c	0.1198	-0.3953	-0.0257	0.8288
var1f	0.5862	0.1739	-0.0795	0.6198
var1m	0.5692	0.2126	0.0062	0.6308
var1p	0.7807	-0.0084	0.1238	0.3752
var2d	-0.0789	0.2284	0.2403	0.8838
var2h	0.3449	0.4791	0.1555	0.6274
var2j	-0.0735	-0.3943	-0.0587	0.8357
var2o	0.3437	-0.1894	-0.0833	0.8391
var2r	0.3156	0.4134	-0.3348	0.6174
var2t	0.2777	0.3868	0.0014	0.7733
var3e	0.1524	-0.0544	0.6138	0.5970
var3g	0.2567	-0.2697	0.4115	0.6921
var3i	-0.0486	0.0917	0.7559	0.4179
var3k	0.1593	-0.0210	0.4799	0.7438
var3n	0.1534	-0.2765	0.2753	0.8242
var4a	0.3396	-0.2660	0.3721	0.6755
var4l	0.1955	0.3434	-0.2004	0.8037
var4q	0.0450	-0.4517	0.0314	0.7930
var4s	0.0657	-0.3955	0.0996	0.8294

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