

# **Spiritual, religious and social capital – exploring their dimensions and their relationship with faith-based motivation and participation in UK civil society.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to advance both the theory and application of the concepts of social capital (in both bonding and bridging modes) and spiritual and religious capital within the complex and diverse postsecular context of the UK. We present quantitative data from a recent survey of religious and spiritual groups undertaken by William Temple Foundation (and funded by the Leverhulme Foundation) which includes responses to a series of Likert scale attitude statements derived from earlier qualitative research. The results of Factor Analysis suggest that a number of distinct components of religious and spiritual capitals can be identified allowing a more nuanced explanation of the field. We compare the responses of people from Muslim, Buddhist, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Free Church and Evangelical backgrounds and discover significant variations that can be related to corresponding theologies and world views.

## **Key words**

Social capital  
Religious capital  
Spiritual capital  
Postsecularism  
Faith and civil society

## **Brief Biography of Authors**

Greg Smith BA M Phil., joined William Temple Foundation in June 2009 as an associate part time researcher. He was formerly a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Institutional Studies, University of East London. Recent research projects and publications from about 1991-2006 centred around the concept and issues of faith communities and their role in urban regeneration and community cohesion. He also has 30 years experience as a 'reflective practitioner' in Christian urban ministry, faith linked community development and urban regeneration, in Newham, (East London) and Preston (Lancashire).

Christopher Baker is Director of Research for the William Temple Foundation and Senior Lecturer in Public and Urban Theology at the University of Chester. He has researched and published extensively on the role of faith groups in urban regeneration and civil society in the UK. Publications include *The Hybrid Church in the City – Third Space Thinking* (SCM, 2009) and *Postsecular Cities – space, theory and practice* (Continuum, 2011)

## 1.1 Introduction

This paper aims to advance both the theory and application of the concepts of spiritual and religious capital within the complex and diverse postsecular context of the UK. Its thesis is that the spiritual and religious capital present within faith groups and their members are *dynamic* yet also *distinctive* fields within social capital as a whole. Furthermore each of the capitals can be described in terms of a range of distinct components which are distributed differently across and within various social and religious groups.

The research cited in this article involved both qualitative and quantitative applications developed as part of a major research project into religious and spiritual capital in the UK by the William Temple Foundation on behalf of the Leverhulme Trust (2007 – 2010). However the main focus will be on the quantitative survey devised by the researchers to test the connections between faith-based motivation and faith-based participation. What the research as a whole, referred to in this paper, seeks to achieve is a greater clarity and measurability of the relationship between faith, personal wellbeing and social action by investigating the categories of religious and spiritual capital in an original and groundbreaking way.

The paper presents the following elements. First, an overview of recent sociological, political and policy shifts within the UK that has given rise to a renewed interest in the role and contribution of faiths within civil society and public life. Second, a brief literature review reflecting on the historical deployment of the concepts of social, religious and spiritual capital, including the current definitions being proposed by the William Temple Foundation. Third, an explication of the Leverhulme research aims and methodologies to

show how these concepts are being operationalised in the survey. The paper concludes with some emerging findings which shed light on the connection between faith-based motivation and participation in wider society and allow us to make comparisons of the significance of these forms of capital across different religious groups.

## **1.2 The emergence of post-secular public space**

A new visibility of religion in public life is now powerfully shaping academic debates and theories. This interest can be tracked at a number of different levels and can increasingly be defined in terms of the *emergence of the postsecular*. Although a not uncontested concept (McLennan 2010, Beckford 2010), the idea of the postsecular is attracting growing attention as a signifier term for a series of coterminous processes that have philosophical, sociological, cultural and political implications. This has entailed a partial or complete revision of the classic secularisation theory which emerged from the mid 1960s. Thus, for Peter Berger, the term ‘secularisation’ described a process ‘by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols’ (1973: 113). Similarly, Bryan Wilson applied the term secularisation to ‘the process by which religious institutions, actions and consciousness lose their social significance’ (1982: 149). Now Berger and others are using terms such as *desecularisation* to describe the resurgence of ‘furious, supernaturalist, fundamentalist or conservative expressions of religion’ (1999: 6) in politics and public life. Jurgen Habermas, meanwhile, refers to ‘a postsecular self-understanding of society as a whole, in which the vigorous continuation of religion in a continually secularizing environment must be reckoned with’ (2005: 26). This last observation suggests that the idea of postsecularism is not describing the replacement of secularisation within liberal democracies by a resurgent public expression of religion.

Rather, it suggests that ongoing dynamics associated with secularism now compete within the public sphere with some unexpected expressions of an emergent and confident religion.

### **1.3 Faith and public policy in the UK**

A second dynamic influencing the spiritual and religious capital debate is centred on social policy discourse about the role of religion in civil society and public life. This can be traced through the impact on UK social policy of seminal US based research from Putnam (2000) and Smidt (2003) which, within the context of a disestablished, deregulated social ‘market’, sees churches and other faith groups as ‘incubators’ for volunteering as well as ‘bulwarks’ against the erosion of civil society.

Within the UK, such a view of religious groups has coalesced within social policy from the late 1990s to the present day with a series of policy initiatives and guidelines. These include the establishment of the Inner Cities Religious Council (replaced by the Faith Communities Consultative Council in 2006); the Local Government Association (LGA) (2002) and Home Office guides (2004) to partnership working with faith communities; the requirement that Local Strategic Partnerships involve and consult faith groups in the development of Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements; and the £13.8 million Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (2007) established to encourage faith groups to build stronger and more cohesive communities and prevent religious extremism.

However, the political rhetoric on religion by which faith is seen as making a positive contribution to social policy areas such as regeneration, social cohesion, anti-terrorism initiatives and private contracting for public services, remains largely superficial and

functionalist. Faith groups are equally ambiguous about their new status as ‘political flavour of the month’; some have welcomed the opportunity to become big players in the provision of social services and the many government area based initiatives. Others however, have felt uneasy at what they consider undue pressure (via funding programmes and ‘capacity-building’ training) to play down their historical identities in favour of being seen as a more homogenised and professionalised ‘sector’.

#### **1.4 The emergence of spiritual and religious capital**

The concept of social capital is now well established in theoretical and policy discourses although there are various formulations and contestations around its use and measurement. A standard definition suggests that ‘...social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’ (Putnam, 2000: 19). More recently Putnam and others have distinguished between **bonding** social capital which describes intra-group networking, **bridging** social capital describing horizontal linkages to other groups, and **linking** social capital describing vertical relationships to centres of resources and power. While this approach is broadly functionalist and resonates with “Third Way” or “Big Society” communitarian politics, other formulations have a more critical edge. Bourdieu for example sees social capital as one of many forms of capital deployed by individuals or groups to their own advantage in struggles over power and resources.

The use of concepts of religious and spiritual capital has emerged sporadically in the last 20 years, but has intensified in frequency since the early 2000s. In 2003 for example, the Metanexus Institute launched a \$3 million Templeton Research programme into spiritual

capital. Its working definition of spiritual capital clearly identifies it as a ‘subset’ of social capital and is therefore, ‘the effects of religious and spiritual practices, beliefs, networks and institutions that have a measurable impact on individuals, communities and societies’ (Metanexus, 2003). The inclusive yet imprecise nature of this definition is acknowledged by Iannacone and Klick (2003) as symptomatic of the concept of spirituality itself. They claim spirituality sidesteps negative images frequently associated with institutional religion whilst being elastic and popular enough to apply to existing as well as new religions, including a range of non-religious activities deemed therapeutic. However, a more precise definition devised by Berger and Hefner describes spiritual capital as ‘the power, influence, knowledge and dispositions created by participation in a particular religious tradition’ (Berger and Hefner, 2003:3).

As regards the concept of religious capital, a key exponent whose work is still highly influential is Pierre Bourdieu. He saw religious capital as functioning in a similar way to cultural capital whereby institutionalised specialists (as the elite producers of meaning) guard and maintain their power in the religious field by means of their ability to ‘modify... the practice and worldview of lay people’ (Bourdieu, 1987: 127). For Bourdieu therefore, religious capital is the amount of knowledge and practice pertaining to religious culture one can bring to bear, and this knowledge and practice determines ones’ hierarchical status’ in the religious field.

Within US settings, it is acknowledged that religiosity is a powerful correlate for most forms of volunteering, philanthropy and social service provision (Putnam 2000:67). Further US-based research concludes that ‘religious spiritual capital’ creates added value at five levels of general social capital, including higher rates of durability, and transference across



wider social, racial and economic groups (Smidt, 2003: 211). In a UK context there are many similar assertions but a more limited evidence base for the positive impact of faith in civil society.

For the purposes of this article we shall be using definitions which have emerged from a UK context in the light of in-depth qualitative research with religious groups engaged in civil renewal and urban regeneration in the course of the Leverhulme Trust study and earlier work carried out by the William Temple Foundation (WTF),

WTF's formulation of the term religious capital is 'the practical contribution to local and national life made by faith groups' (Baker and Skinner, 2006:9). In our survey we define religious capital as *the practical contribution that faith groups make to society by creating networks of trust, guidance and support (e.g. through the use of a building, volunteers, paid community workers, training organisations and activities for particular age or interest groups etc)*. This is a more corporate and communitarian in emphasis than Bourdieu's definition which sees religious capital as a resource which may serve an individual in a competition for status.

Spiritual capital on the other hand, 'energises religious capital by providing a theological identity and worshipping tradition, but also a value system, moral vision and a basis for faith' (Baker and Skinner, 2006:9). Spiritual capital is often embedded locally within faith groups, but also expressed in the lives of individuals. WTF's definition of spiritual capital thus stresses the 'why' of faith-based participation, not simply the 'how'. The emphasis on the why helps deepen the somewhat functionalist discourse on faith groups' contributions to civil society discussed above. And by separating but also linking the concepts of spiritual

and religious capital, WTF's research also suggests that a 'virtuous cycle' of social capital production can occur when spiritual values and theological motivation are connected to practical action (Baker and Miles-Watson, 2008). In the context of our survey we define spiritual capital as *"the spiritual values and vision for the future that we express in activities such as prayer and worship, and which motivate us to make a practical contribution to society."*

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 'Faith and Traditional Capitals – defining the scope of religious capital' - The Leverhulme research project into religious and spiritual capital (2007-2010)**

This study, building on WTF's previous work in urban regeneration, is designed to test the concepts of religious and spiritual capital across the major religious and spiritual traditions in the UK. Part of that testing out is to ask faith groups for alternatives to the concept of *capital* which perhaps better express, in their own terms, why they do what they do when they choose to extend the benefits they receive to those beyond the membership of their group. This is designed to see whether we can develop supplementary discourses to that of 'capital' when it comes to evaluating the impact of faith-based engagement in the public domain. After an extensive literature review, the research team convened 25 focus groups across different faith traditions in the North-west of England and asked the following questions. 'What do you perceive to be the benefits of being a member of this religious or spiritual group?' 'How are those benefits shared with the wider community?' 'How do you rate the usefulness of the above definitions of spiritual and religious capital?' 'What

alternative words, pictures or ideas might better convey to an outsider the importance of what you do, and why you do it?’ Over 150 participants contributed to the focus groups and the conversations were transcribed. These transcriptions were analysed using the thematic network method, and several of the emerging themes and statements this generated were converted into a form suitable for use in a quantitative survey.

The intention of this quantitative phase was to assess the wider validity, salience and agreement levels for statements made by focus group respondents and to test the concepts of religious and spiritual capital among people associated with “faith communities” in the UK. It also would give us the opportunity to assess whether there were significant differences in response across different religious groups, and in correlation with other major demographic variables.

## **2.2. The Questionnaire**

The resulting 100 item questionnaire was developed, piloted and administered over a three month period between July and October 2009. The majority of items in the self completion questionnaire were presented in the form of five category Likert Scale items, in which respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with selected statements related to social, religious and spiritual capital. A small scale pilot exercise checked for the clarity of printed instructions and tested some alternative approaches, including numerical rating scales. However, we settled on the Likert Scale methodology as the clearest and simplest for our respondents to use and for the researchers to analyse and interpret.

The survey fieldwork was conducted in two separate exercises. A number of religious groups (Christian Churches, Hindu Temples and an Islamic Seminary), mainly in the North-west of England, agreed to ask all their adult members to complete a paper questionnaire. In some cases this was done as a group exercise on a single occasion. In others, members completed the survey book separately and returned it to a central collection point. At the same time an online version of the survey was uploaded onto the internet using the “SURVEY MONKEY” web site. The opportunity to use this version was widely promoted using personal networks and electronic mailing lists which targeted people likely to be involved in religious activity within the UK. With regard to access to the online version, we relied on respondents’ honesty in terms of being aged 18 or over, and being resident in the UK. In both paper and online versions the survey was anonymous, and assurances were given that individual responses would remain confidential to the research team.

We acknowledge that all the data collected is based on subjective self report. The restriction of the medium of communication to the written English language will have excluded people not fluent or comfortably literate in English, or possibly have introduced random error where particular instructions or terminology were not fully understood. Finally, with hindsight, it is apparent that the questionnaire design, with a large block of items presented in a standard order, with few negative statements included, and probably too many statements reflecting “motherhood and apple pie” values, could have been stronger. Such weaknesses may have introduced setting effects in completing blocks of items in a hurry, and may have reduced variance between respondents across the data set.

## 2.3 The Respondents

The findings presented in this paper are from a consolidated data set of 795 responses. 466 cases (58.6%) are derived from the online survey. The remaining 329 cases (41.4%) were completed on paper by members of different local religious organisations. Over half of the responses came from the North-west of England with the remainder widely distributed geographically across the UK. Demographically exactly equal numbers of males (369) and females (369) with 57 respondents (7.2% not disclosing their gender) completed the survey (although there were imbalances in particular faith / denominational groups). Ages ranged from 18 to over 80, with 61% reporting themselves in the age range 40-69 and 53.4% over 50. Educational levels were substantially higher than the average for the UK population with 66% of respondents saying they had a university degree or professional qualification.

Ethnically 557 people (75% of those who answered this question) described themselves as from White British background. Another 29 (4%) said they were from some other white background, and 13 (1.7%) that they were White Irish. The only other categories ticked by more than 10 respondents were. Asian/Asian British – Indian, 40, (5.4%), Asian/Asian British – Pakistani, 39 (5.2%) and Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi, 14, (1.9%). There was a strong association between South Asian ethnic identities and those identifying as Muslim or Hindu. However among the Muslims were also 4 White British and 2 Black British respondents, including some from other ethnic backgrounds. Of the Buddhists 77% said they were White British and a further 16% from other white backgrounds. Of the major Christian denominational categories over 90% in each group were from White British, Irish or various other White backgrounds.

608 respondents (76.5%) indicated that they were from a Christian background and could be unambiguously assigned to one of four major denominational groupings. 170 (21.4% of whole sample) were Roman Catholics, 160 (20.1%) Anglicans, 150 (18.9%) Free Church (Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Salvationist etc.), and 106 (13.3%) Evangelical, (Independent, Pentecostal, Charismatic New Churches etc.). Not included in these major denominational categories were 7 Quakers, 4 Christian Scientist and other individuals who belonged to minority groupings or gave idiosyncratic descriptions of their (Christian) religious identity.

Among the 181 Non-Christians were 103 Muslims (13% of whole sample), 37 (4.7%) Buddhists, 13 (1.6%) Hindus, 6 Jewish, 6 Bah'ais, 2 Sikhs, 3 with no religion, 1 spiritual agnostic, 1 Druid and one member of the Church of Satan.

These statistics mean that for comparative purposes it is only meaningful to analyse different response patterns between the six major groupings, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Free Church, Evangelicals, Muslims and Buddhists, with all other respondents pooled into the category of "other"

The research design and the largely opportunistic sampling strategy precludes any serious claims to this survey's wider representation. Nor is it possible to extrapolate the findings to make any general estimates about the general population of the UK, or even of particular faith communities. However, the sample does include a broad coverage of the major faith traditions in the UK which should allow some relatively robust comparisons between the larger groups in the data set. It has to be acknowledged that despite our targeted fieldwork efforts, coverage was disappointing among the Hindu and Black Christian communities.

### **3 Findings presented in key themes**

In the following section the findings are presented in a logical thematic sequence beginning with general responses to the concepts of different forms of capitals and alternative formulations of values, then working through social, religious and spiritual capital each of which are broken down into different salient components or dimensions. The themes relate to groups of questionnaire items brought together as a result of factor analysis. 16 factors (out of 18 in total which were extracted) are relatively straightforward to interpret and are discussed in some detail. The full rotated factor matrix is available in an appendix to the on-line version of the article.

In our detailed analysis of the data set we compared and tested the significance of the scores on each factor, of people from Muslim, Buddhist, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Free Church and Evangelical backgrounds and used exploratory multivariate analysis to control for the influence of other demographic variables. However, limitations of article size mean that here we can only use a few selected examples of simple cross tabulations of individual questionnaire items which show large variation between groups to enable the reader to get an idea of the evidence base generated by the survey data. A small selection of regression output tables are available in an appendix to the on line version of the article for readers interested in the technical aspects of our analysis.

#### **3.1 The concepts of the three capitals**

To test whether the concepts of social, religious and spiritual capital as defined in our research were broadly comprehensible and acceptable to a wider public, respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of each term on a five point scale with 5 defined as “very useful” and 1 as “not at all useful”:

- I would rate the usefulness of the idea of social capital as
- I would rate the usefulness of the idea of religious capital as
- I would rate the usefulness of the idea of spiritual capital as.

Overall scores were high, with spiritual capital scoring highest:

Mean scores (out of 5) social 3.9 religious 4.1 spiritual 4.2

The few negative comments concerned the perceived ‘over abstract’ nature of the concepts, which was perhaps borne out by a relatively high number of respondents leaving this sub section blank. The three items were shown by factor analysis to be highly correlated in response patterns, so respondents who rated any one highly useful were also likely to rate the other two highly useful.

Gender differences proved significant with male respondents likely to find the concepts less useful. The cross-tabulations of the items showed this difference was mainly for the concept of social capital but even here it was only around 10% of men who gave ratings lower than 3 out of 5 on the scale. There was some variation between faith/denominational groups with the Muslims and Catholics giving higher average scores on all three items and the Buddhists lower than average ones.



### 3.2 Alternative foundational values

In order to offer the opportunity to consider alternative formulations about the essential value of faith, respondents were given a chance to endorse or reject a battery of other ideas unearthed in the qualitative stage. Factor 2 accounting for 6.5% of the variance in the data brought together as highly correlated the following statements:

For me the essence of my belief's contribution to society is that;

- it shows us wisdom,
- it prompts us to service,
- it gives us values,
- it provides a foundation for life,
- it leads to practical action,
- it shows us beauty,
- it gives us community,
- it leads to life transformation,
- it is a gift,
- it brings both social and spiritual benefits,
- it involves human connection,
- it calls us to selflessness.

Two only two other contenders (“endowment”, and “submission to God”) evoked a different pattern of response. For every item except one (“Beauty”) a majority of respondents ticked the “strongly agree” box. The regression analysis indicated that:

- Muslims have stronger positive agreement scores than non-Muslims;

- Respondents with ‘very strong belief’ have stronger positive agreement scores;
- Respondents with ‘very frequent attendance’ have stronger positive agreement scores;
- Females have significantly higher positive agreement scores.

In addition respondents were invited to summarise the essence of their faith in their own words. A wide and rich variety of terms and concepts were recorded, especially by respondents completing the survey online which are worthy of more detailed analysis in their own right. In all 160 respondents wrote in alternative “essentials”. Of these just under half could be categorised as representing one or more “soft values” from a list including such terms as “acceptance, belonging, compassion, contentment, encouragement, equality, family, fellowship, forgiveness, freedom, friendship, harmony, hope, love, peace, security, sanctuary, shalom, sharing, stability, togetherness, unity, wholeness”. “Serving” and “sense of purpose” were also quite popular

### **3.3 Exploring the three Capitals**

The wealth of material generated by the factor analysis of the survey items allows a deeper explication of social, religious and spiritual capital. In the case of social capital the expected distinction between bridging and bonding forms was easily apparent, but our factor analysis has given greater explication and depth to existing definitions of bonding and bridging. For definitions of religious and spiritual capital, factor analysis has allowed us to isolate a number of themes which indicate the need for a more nuanced approach to the definitions that we have used so far.

### **3.3.1 Social Capital**

#### **3.3.1.1) Bonding - the religious community as a source of emotional and cultural wellbeing and cognitive development**

Factor 4 (accounting for 3.65% of the variance) can best be interpreted as measuring the importance for the respondents of bonding social capital found in the context of their religious group. The analysis brought together the following statements sharing high factor ratings:

- Through my religious or spiritual group (RSG) I meet people who inspire me;
- I feel part of a wider family when I am in my RSG;
- I meet lots of different people through my RSG;
- I meet people who have the same beliefs as me through my RSG;
- I feel more secure and less anxious by taking part in RSG;
- Through my RSG I can explore deeper questions;
- Through my RSG I make connections with others who help me with life outside.

The items when examined for their semantic content appear to speak of the warmth of belonging to a family, with internal diversity but sharing fundamental values and beliefs.

This environment is perceived as supportive and inspirational for wider life and as fostering emotional and cognitive wellbeing.

The regression analysis (see Regression Table 1 in the online appendix) and cross-tabulations (see Tables 1 – IV) for responses to an example statement) showed that:

- Younger respondents are more likely to strongly agree with statements;
- Very Strong believers are more likely to strongly agree with statements;
- Frequent attenders are more likely to strongly agree with statements;
- Roman Catholics are less likely to strongly agree with statements.

#### INSERT TABLES I - IV

There is enough here to suggest that bonding social capital (mutual belonging and trusting each other) is a vital component of religious activity across the board. It may even be growing in importance with a trend away from simply attending worship (a traditional Catholic approach) to more active involvement and participation within younger and more progressive congregations.

#### **3.3.1.2) Bridging Social capital: the religious community as a source of confidence in engaging with others**

Factor 9 (accounting for 2.0% of the variance) grouped together items which can best be interpreted as measuring religion and bridging social capital. The analysis brought together the following statements:

- My religious/spiritual beliefs (RSB) lead me to mix with people from other religions;
- My RSB lead me to mix with people from other cultural backgrounds;
- It is difficult to build friendships with neighbours from different religious or ethnic backgrounds.

The common semantic content of these items is about social mixing with different “others” and the apparently strong link (contrary to much popular received wisdom) between this and the context of religious believing and belonging. Overall 73 % of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that *“My religious/spiritual beliefs lead me to mix with people from other cultural backgrounds”* and 74% disagreed or strongly disagreed that *“It is difficult to build friendships with neighbours from different religious or ethnic backgrounds”*

#### INSERT TABLE V

The regression analysis (see Regression Table 2 in on-line appendix) identified significant differences based on faith/denomination affiliation. Muslims were likely to have significantly more positive scores in terms of bridging social capital with Free Church members also scoring above average, while Anglicans, Catholics, Evangelicals and Buddhists scored less positively. Evangelicals in particular came out as least open to bridging, possibly because the sample majority are white British, middle class and living in mono-cultural suburban or rural settings. The positive responses from Muslims which counter the stereotype of self-imposed segregation require some comment. They may reflect accurately the ethics of mainstream Islam, and/ or the fact that the majority of British Muslims live and work easily enough in contexts of ethnic and religious diversity. There could also be an added element of wishing to stress “good citizenship” in the current political climate where Muslims tend to be excluded and marginalised as “aliens” and “terrorists”.

### **3.3.2 Religious capital**

Religious capital was defined for the purposes of our survey as the *practical contribution that faith groups make to society through the use of a building, volunteers, paid community workers, and activities for particular age or interest groups etc.* Factor analysis drew together a large number of items in relation to this definition, which can be grouped together under the following themes:

- Religious buildings as resources for individuals and for the wider community;
- Religion as the driver of social concern and practical good works;
- The link between institutional religion and traditional and contemporary cultures, and social identities.

### **3.3.2.1) Themes around buildings: the religious building as a space for strengthening my social, emotional and spiritual resources**

The third factor accounting for 4.8% of the variance in the data brought together a group of variables clearly referring to the social and spiritual value of the place of worship for the individual believer. These variables included:

- I value my building because it is a place for socialising;
- I value my building because it is a place where I hear about news and events;
- I value my building because it is a place where I can learn more about my faith/religion;
- I value my building because it is a place where ‘I feel at home’;
- I value my building because it is a place where I pray;
- I value my building because it is a place of escape;

- I value my building because it is place where I can get closer to God.

Some of the items clearly have a spiritual focus where the building is perceived as a place of prayer, worship or religious formation. Others are more practical and reflect the value of faith-based social networking in a context of both community and spiritual belonging.

There was a strong overall agreement with this group of statements in the general order of 70-80% (with the exception of the “escapist” statement where only about a quarter agreed). Regression analysis identified only one variable, “online or paper respondents”, as producing a highly significant effect. Those completing the questionnaire on paper, often in the context of attendance at the building in question, were consistently more likely to ‘strongly agree’ with statements valuing the building.

However, the difference in reported attendance rates between on-line and paper respondents is not that great with 88% of online respondents attending at least weekly, compared with 95% of the paper respondents, although the difference in reported daily attendance is greater (12% v 25%).

### **3.3.2.2) Themes around buildings: The religious building as resource for the wider community (i.e. as a functional, symbolic and cultural space)**

The twelfth factor extracted (accounting for 1.75% of the variance) concerned the value of the building in the wider community. In fact these items had been presented together as a sub-section of the questionnaire, and clearly reflect a range of recognized functions of places of worship in local neighbourhoods:

- My religious/holy building (RHB) is a place of celebration for the local community (e.g. births, marriages, funerals, festivals);

- My RHB is valuable as a landmark or sign to the whole community;
- My RHB offers a sense of peace by being open to the public for prayer/meditation;
- My RHB is frequently used by non-religious groups (e.g. local council/local school/community organisations);
- My RHB functions as an advice and drop-in centre.

Agreement with these items was at a lower level overall (typically 50%-75% range) and regression analysis suggested denominational affiliation accounted for most of the significant differences between groups. Roman Catholics and Anglicans were more likely to have a building which was made available to the wider community, with Free Church, Muslims, Evangelicals and Buddhists scoring below average in that order. Overall familiar Anglican and Catholic models of the church as sacred space and community centre for the neighbourhood parish, and their continued privileged position in terms of networks with the secular establishment seem to be borne out in these response patterns.

INSERT TABLE VI

### **3.3.2.3) Institutional Religion as enabling wider participation, empathy and concern at both local and global levels**

The following two themes extracted by factor analysis indicate how religious capital (i.e. practical contribution to wider civil society and ‘glocal’ empathy at the situation of others) is fostered by participation in religious institutions.

The first theme was generated by a strong correlation between these two statements:

- Membership of a religious/spiritual group teaches me responsibility to others;



- Worship creates in me a sense of commitment to practical action.

Over 90% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with these statements, with regression analysis suggesting agreement was stronger within the under 50s and among frequent attenders and very strong believers. There were some other significant associations with faith / denomination with Free Church respondents agreeing more strongly than average and evangelicals less strongly. Individual item crosstabulations suggest Muslims had particularly strong agreement and Buddhists had significantly lower levels of agreement than others, especially on the second statement.

#### INSERT TABLE VII

The second theme (Factor 11) is based on the six statements and can best be interpreted as measuring the link between faith and concern with the needs of other people, both globally and locally. The statements are:

- People who are not religious assume religious or spiritual people offer unconditional service to others;
- People in the wider community look to religious and spiritual groups to offer help to the most needy;
- I am connected in prayer with situations in other parts of the world through my religious or spiritual group;
- People who are not religious still think that religious or spiritual groups are a force for good in the local community;
- Attending my place of worship allows me to learn about and respond to situations of need around the world;
- Praying for others creates a sense of connection with those who are elsewhere.

Semantically three of these items focus on the perceptions of outsiders about the relationship of faith-based organisations to local needs. In contrast, the other three are about global awareness and the role that participation in religion and the act of prayer promotes concern for and response to wider needs. Regression analysis on this data highlighted differences based on faith/denomination affiliation. Free Church members had the highest agreement scores on this factor followed by Muslims and Anglicans, with evangelicals, Roman Catholics and Buddhists (and the “other” category) scoring significantly below average.

#### **3.3.2.4 Institutional Religion as vehicle for cultural identity and transmission of culture**

Three items grouped together in the factor analysis (Factor 15) appear to measure the perceived link between faith and culture/tradition. They are:

- Religion is important for handing down language and culture to future generations;
- It is an endowment (i.e. an inheritance or tradition);
- My faith allows me to celebrate my national culture or language.

Overall responses to these statements tended to produce divided responses weighted towards agreement for the first two, and balanced almost equally for the third. Regression analysis showed that over 50s were significantly more likely to agree with these statements, while very frequent attenders were less likely to agree. Roman Catholics and Muslims appear to see handing down the religious tradition as more important than the other groups.

### **3.3.2.5 Religious identity as source of tension within the wider community**

A final theme under the heading of religious capital (Factor 14) relates to the sense of perceived conflict or tension with the secular world. In Christian discourse this has been described in terms of being “in the world but not of the world” while in sociology of religion it is approached in terms of the typology of *sect* versus *church* (with plurality of *denominations* as the intermediate type). The statements correlated under this heading were:

- The local neighbourhood is a hostile environment for me as a person of faith or spiritual beliefs;
- It is not easy being a person of faith/belief in the community in which I live;
- My values out me at odds with the wider community.

Only about a third of respondents saw their faith at odds with their community, while nearly a half rejected this view. In contrast opinion was almost equally divided about the two statements reflecting the difficulty of being a person of faith in contemporary society. The regression analysis showed significant gender differences, with men being much more likely to agree about the difficulty of being a person of faith in the secular world. Under 50s were also significantly more likely to agree.

### **3.3.3 Spiritual capital**

Spiritual Capital was defined in the survey as *the spiritual values and vision for the future that we express in activities such as prayer and worship, and which motivates us to make a practical contribution to the wider world as well as to people within our own group.*

Our analysis suggests that it is indeed possible to identify a constellation of beliefs, value orientations and practices which distinguish people of faith from unbelievers. Several distinct themes or groups of statements were identified using factor analysis which help elucidate the varieties and dimensions of spiritual capital found among the respondents, and which call for a more sophisticated and nuanced description of spiritual capital than we started with.

### **3.3.3.1) Spiritual Capital (expressed in Prayer, Worship, and Holy Books) nurtures and expresses a transcendent world view**

Factor analysis revealed a group of 18 items which were strongly correlated together and can be taken as representing a general level of conventional theistic religiosity and faith in God. These were:

- Prayer is an opportunity to thank God for everything;
- Prayer is an opportunity to bring your problems before God;
- My holy book teaches me God's perspective;
- My holy book is proof of God's existence;
- When I worship I have a sense of God's forgiveness;
- My holy book is unchanging and contains eternal truths;
- When I worship God I feel a sense of calm;
- Prayer is submission to God;
- I use my holy book as a manual to guide me through life;
- Praying for those who are sick has a healing effect;
- Prayer helps me to do good things in my life;
- Worshipping makes me realise how fortunate I am;

- I value my building because it is a place where I can get closer to God;
- Prayer is a means of purifying yourself;
- Having a religious or spiritual belief creates strength of character;
- Prayer is an opportunity to receive God’s healing power;
- I have the confidence to know who I am because of my faith;
- Praying for those who are sick does not have a beneficial effect.

The majority of these items refer to the value or efficacy of prayer, or the emotional/spiritual value of worship as communion with the Divine or as personal alignment with the divine purpose (most clearly stated in the notion of “submission to God”). Another sub group of items focuses on the role and importance of Scripture in the believer’s life. Typically over 75% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with most of these statements.

Regression analysis on these factor scores revealed significant variation according to faith / denomination, self reported strength of religious belief and level of education (see Regression Table 3 in Online appendix). For example, Muslims, Evangelical Christians and Roman Catholics scored much higher than the average (agreed more strongly) on these items while Buddhists scored much below average. The pattern of response is not surprising given the loyalty to Scripture and/or traditional belief found among the former groups and the non-theistic belief systems of Buddhism. Indeed, many Buddhists contacted us to express the difficulty of completing a questionnaire that had a number of theistic presuppositions.

Those who reported that their beliefs were “very strong” predictably scored significantly higher than the rest on these statements, as did respondents without a degree or professional qualification.

The remaining factors illustrate the complexity and variety of modes of spiritual capital within a context of religious diversity.

### **3.3.3.2) Spiritual capital creates an impact in the wider community**

Factor 5 grouped together five items and can best be interpreted as measuring outwardly visible spirituality in the sense of respondents’ confidence that their religion makes a significant impact on other people. These items were:

- I send out a ‘positive vibe’ through the way I live out my religious and spiritual beliefs (RSB);
- I share my faith/beliefs by being a good example for others;
- I create a ‘sense of peace’ around me through the way I live out my RSB;
- My neighbours/work colleagues trust me more because they know that I am a religious/spiritual person;
- I create a ‘knock-on’ effect on others through the way I live out my RSB.

Most items reflect the hopes rather than the deliberate actions of the believer and their concern that their everyday lives are seen as a “good witness” and evidence of the validity of their faith commitment, rather than as active proselytisation.

Regression analysis showed that Anglicans, and Free Church members had significantly lower than average agreement levels corresponding to their relative lack of confidence on

these items. Those aged over 50 were also likely to show uncertainty while very frequent attenders and online respondents appeared more confident in agreeing with them.

### **3.3.3.3) Spiritual Capital as an embodied spirituality or practice of prayer**

Factor 6 grouped together items which are best interpreted as measuring a Prayer and Bodily Spirituality cluster. These included:

- Praying for those who have died is important;
- Touch (for example handling holy objects or a reassuring touch from a fellow worshipper) is an important part of my religious/spiritual experience;
- Being aware of my breathing and heart rate is an important part of my religious/spiritual experience (see TABLE VIII below)

#### **INSERT TABLE VIII**

It is not immediately clear from the semantics what these statements have in common. These items generated quite polarised results, with almost as many people disagreeing as agreeing with several of them. However the relationship of the human soul/spirit to the human body is clearly an important feature of this element of spiritual capital. Regression analysis identifies Buddhists, Muslims and Roman Catholics with higher than average agreement with these items, contrasting strongly with Evangelical and Free Church respondents. Older respondents and those with very strong beliefs also tended towards stronger agreement.

### **3.3.3.4) Spiritual Capital helps moderate lifestyle and enhances personal resilience and development**

Factor 8 grouped another five items, best interpreted as measuring the salience of Religion, Temperance and Character Transformation. These statements were:

- Having religious/spiritual belief (RSB) helps me to abstain (for example, alcohol, drugs) or moderate my lifestyle;
- Attending my religious/spiritual group helps me to abstain or moderate my lifestyle;
- I am changing at a deep level because of my faith;
- My RSB give me a new lifestyle;
- Having a RSB creates strength of character.

All these items have some relationship to individual behaviour, morality and lifestyle, emphasising the formation of character and the recognition that this is inevitably a work in progress as the believer seeks to grow or change at the deepest spiritual level.

60-80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with these statements and regression analysis found significantly higher levels of agreement for very strong believers, for male respondents (especially on the temperance and strength of character items) as well as faith differences. Buddhists have significantly higher levels of agreement, while Catholics are significantly lower. The Muslims generally have higher than average levels of agreement except for an anomaly in rejecting the notion of having a new lifestyle.

### **3.3.3.5) Spiritual Capital as a resource for a material and expressive spirituality which generates a sense of confidence**



Factor 12 grouped together various items which clearly have some link with the idea of expressive or creative spirituality. These items seem to reflect the compulsion to declare or celebrate publicly, through a variety of media, how and why faith is important to the believer:

- Singing is an important part of my religious/spiritual experience (RSE);
- Through my religious or spiritual group I have the opportunity to tell my life story;
- I share my beliefs by talking about them in public;
- Dance is an important part of my RSE.

For the item about singing 75-80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, for 'telling my life story' around 60% while for dance it was around 10%. Regression analysis suggested that people with very strong beliefs had significantly higher than average agreement scores on these items. In broad terms Evangelicals, Free Church affiliates and Muslims had above average agreement while Buddhists and Roman Catholics were significantly lower than average in agreement levels. Detailed item by item examination shows a more nuanced picture; for example Muslims showed considerable rejection of the importance of dance, and lower than average acceptance of singing as important.

## **4. Conclusion**

What then are the key themes and conclusions emerging from our survey in terms of our 'virtuous cycle' capital thesis generated by the causal relationship between faith-based motivation and spiritual wellbeing and participation in or contributions to wider society?

1. The large majority of all respondents said they found the concepts of the three types of capital useful as a way of talking about the contribution of their faith group with a particular positive response to the notion of spiritual capital.
2. A large majority of respondents endorsed (or added to) a set of “soft values” as being the essence of their faith and there was a noticeable absence (with the exception of a handful of Evangelical voices) of statements of hard dogma or moral outrage.
3. Respondents placed a high value on the bonding social capital experienced through belonging to their religious group, which tended to be highest for those who were most committed in terms of strong belief and frequent attendance. Among the Christian groups Roman Catholics expressed this somewhat less strongly than other denominations.
4. The respondents generally strongly endorsed the importance of bridging social capital with Muslim, Anglican and Free Church respondents being most positive. Evangelicals found bridging social capital least essential to their faith, particularly in terms of bridging across to other religions.
5. Buildings as places of worship, learning and socialising for the faith community were highly valued across the groups, though the difference between online and paper respondents suggests there may be an active group of cyberspace believers less strongly emotionally tied and connected to their local church/faith building and congregation.
6. Buildings were seen as valuable assets for the wider community by a majority of respondents with Anglicans and Roman Catholics endorsing this role more readily than Muslim, Free Church or Evangelical respondents.

7. Social responsibility and the link between faith and practical action was widely endorsed (especially by highly committed people) with Free Church respondents indicating this most strongly and Evangelicals somewhat less than average. Concern and prayer for local and global needs showed some similar trends suggesting that the non-conformist social conscience is still significant.
8. Handing down culture and tradition through religion, though recognized as valuable, does not seem to be of central importance to the religious identity of most Christians, especially the most committed. Older respondents and Roman Catholics were more likely to be concerned with this, as were Muslims.
9. Only a minority of Christians (concentrated among Evangelicals) see their faith as counter cultural. Many, including Muslim respondents, found difficulty being a person of faith in the secular world. Men and younger people felt this to be particularly so.
10. Many in our sample possessed high levels of spiritual capital strongly expressed in terms of loyalty to conventional beliefs and religious practices of prayer, worship and trust in Scripture. Such believers were less likely to be university educated, and more likely to be Muslim, Roman Catholic or Evangelical. However set alongside the other factors emerging from our survey it would appear there is not enough evidence to label this as “fundamentalism”.
11. The tentative responses to the idea that personal faith makes an impact in the wider community (especially from Anglican and Free Church respondents) suggest that spiritual capital is not generally expressed as aggressive or “in your face” evangelism.
12. Spiritual capital (with some exceptions among Roman Catholics, Buddhists and Muslims) is not generally linked to the need to become involved in meditative or

bodily focused practices and such approaches tend to be rejected by Free Church and Evangelical respondents.

13. Spiritual capital is linked by Muslims and many Christians (especially among men) with moral and temperate behaviour, and with character building and transformation of lifestyle. Roman Catholics appear less firm on these aspects.
14. Spiritual capital is linked with the need for personal expression, and in the Free Church and Evangelical culture singing and personal testimony seems to retain a strong place.

If this survey gives a sound mapping of the lie of the land in contemporary British religion it suggests a mainstream experience of persisting important levels of spiritual and religious capital linked with strong bonding social capital that does not inhibit bridging with the wider community. There is strong conventional belief to be found, but without too much dogmatic or sectarian emphasis, or strident political or moral articulation. We have teased out several distinct themes within the three capitals investigated, distributed differentially between denominations and other demographic groups. The picture overall is one of “soft values”, pro social activity and involvement, a very British middle way that resonates well with contemporary culture. Comfortable, consensus building and communitarian, such faiths may be congenial to the established church and government policy makers rather than a threat to community cohesion as has been frequently suggested. (8186 words)



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## Notes

**( Note 1 The factor solution was based on a pool of 90 variables, subjected to Principal Components Analysis, using 794 cases with the missing data values being dealt with using the mean substitution option. This generated 18 factors with an eigenvalue >1.0 which cumulatively accounted for 63% of the variance in the data. The rotated factor solution was produced using the varimax method with Kaiser normalisation and converged after 30 iterations.).**