Faith in Action

The dynamic connection between spiritual and religious capital

by Chris Baker
and Hannah Skinner

With thanks to all the people who shared their hopes and ideas with us over the three years of this research

CONTENTS

Background

The William Temple Foundation's three year research programme - *Regenerating Communities – a theological and strategic critique* – has explored and reflected on the experience of nine different churches and church-based projects and their engagement with civil society and urban change in Manchester. In all, we sought the views and experiences of over eighty people at local, regional and national level. This type of engagement has been welcomed nationally by central government as part of a policy of decentralisation that involves political participation at many levels and the local delivery of services to communities. We address this issue primarily from a Christian, therefore church-based, perspective, but we believe there is overlap between our thinking and understandings from other faith traditions. For this reason, we have used the definitions 'spiritual' and 'religious' capital without attaching 'Christian' as a prefix to these terms. We propose further research with other faith traditions and perspectives to test the viability of the concepts and policies proposed in this report.

Emerging themes

Three key features emerged from our research:

- The diverse spectrum of theologies and ways faith communities engage with wider society.

- The difficulties in communicating with non-religious partners engaged in regeneration about the impact of faith-based engagement, the theological identities and values that support it and are inextricably bound up with it.

- The concepts of *spiritual capital* and *religious capital* as ways of describing faith-based engagement within the public domain. Developed with reference to the concept of social capital, these terms highlight the overlapping, yet distinctive ways in which faith communities engage with mainly secular understandings of regeneration, civil society and urban renaissance (see page 11 for a definition of the relationship between spiritual/religious and social capital).

Definitions of spiritual and religious capital

We propose the following definitions – aware of the distinction between these two terms, but also their close connection.

- ➢ *Spiritual* **capital energises religious capital by providing a theological identity and worshipping tradition, but also a value system, moral vision and a basis of faith. Spiritual capital is often embedded locally within faith groups but also expressed in the lives of individuals.**

- ➢ *Religious* **capital is the practical contribution to local and national life made by faith groups.**

A significant development in our final year's thinking has been the distinction between what *motivates* faith-based communities' engagement, and their *practical* actions. In other words we have distinguished between the *why* and *what* of church contributions to their communities.

The 'why' we have defined as ***spiritual capital*** – i.e. the motivating basis of faith, belief and values (sometimes expressed in tangible forms as worship, credal statements and articles of faith, or more intangibly as one's own 'spirituality') that shapes the actions of faith communities.

The 'what' we have defined as ***religious capital*** – i.e. the concrete actions and resources that faith communities contribute as a direct result of their spiritual capital.

Some of the contributions of religious and spiritual capital naturally overlap with the practices and values of secular civil society – others are more distinctive and can create dissonance and discomfort.

To develop wider thinking about the practical 'outworkings' of religious and spiritual capital, we propose the following policy recommendations, addressed in turn to secular partners working within regeneration and civil society, and to churches themselves (along with other faith groups as appropriate).

Policy recommendations for secular partners
(For example, central and regional government, local authorities, the community and voluntary sector and academia)

We recommend that these sectors:
- Increase awareness of the concept of spiritual and religious capital at local, national and regional level by means of research, training and other forms of dissemination.

- Evaluate the usefulness of these concepts as a tool for promoting further religious literacy (or knowledge) among non faith-based partners.

- Develop multi-level, inter-disciplinary conversations about the contribution religious capital (informed by spiritual capital) makes to wider civil society.

- Devise (in consultation with faith-based groups) comprehensive criteria for funding and evaluating partnership programmes that are more inclusive and reflective of the theological nature of the values, vision and identities of faith groups.

- Commission UK-based research into comparative study of the spectrum of engagements by different faith groups with civil society (i.e. their religious

capital) as informed by the values, vision and identities that support that engagement (i.e. their spiritual capital).

Policy recommendations for faith communities
(For example, church-based institutions and communities, and other faiths where appropriate)

We recommend that these sectors:

- Increase awareness of the concept of religious capital (informed by spiritual capital) at local, regional and national level by means of research, training and other forms of dissemination

- Evaluate the usefulness of these concepts as a tool for promoting religious literacy (or understanding) between different faith partners and within single faith traditions.

- (In relation to the above) Develop an inter-faith ethic as the basis for respect and understanding of diversity, but also respect for overlapping values and ways of working within inter-faith partnerships.

- Devise expanded criteria for measuring the effectiveness of the contribution of religious capital to wider civil society in consultation with non-faith sector partners.

- Commission further UK-based research to reflect on the active contribution of churches and faith communities to the wider community. For example, churches and other faith groups as:

  ➢ public spaces, or 'squares'
  ➢ providers and nurturers of local leadership and trainers in the experiences of democracy
  ➢ practitioners of inclusive participation within local communities.
  ➢ social economic entrepreneurs

Further research possibilities
(which could contribute to our policy recommendations)

a) *A comparative study*. This could explore the nature of spiritual and religious capital as expressed by different faith communities in the UK. The research could identify the overlapping as well as distinctive elements within each faith tradition. Such a study would need to recognise the broad spectrum of theological understandings within each faith tradition.

b) *An interdisciplinary research project*. This could move towards identifying and assessing the different *forms* of spiritual/religious capital identified in this research and

elsewhere. Such a research project could evaluate case studies of religious capital within some of the following UK based contexts:

- Economics (e.g. micro-economic/social economic/non-usurious practice/human wellbeing debates)
- Civil society and urban/rural renewal (multi-use centres, empowerment networks, volunteering and service provision schemes, worship)
- Regional governance (e.g. regional faith forums, churches' officers)
- Education – primary, secondary, tertiary (faith-based schools/colleges/chaplains
- Criminal Justice system (e.g. prison chaplaincy, restorative justice schemes)
- Health care (e.g. hospital chaplaincy, alternative therapies)
- Transport (e.g. airport chaplaincy)
- Industry and manufacturing (e.g. industrial mission)
- Housing industry (e.g. faith-based housing associations)
- Retailing sector (e.g. interfaith hyper-market chaplaincy)
- Sports, Culture and Heritage (including community arts)
- Planning and architecture (e.g. the 'faith' of the planner or the architect)

c) *An exploration and reflection on the gendered experience of regeneration and civil renewal*, *as expressed by faith communities and individuals.* This would focus primarily on the use of language and other forms of discourse (e.g. public meetings, written reports etc.) This picks up an emergent theme within this research which identifies different metaphors and linguistic patterns used by men and women when describing their sense of role and identity (including that of faith) within the public realm. Recognition and enhanced knowledge of these different approaches will help create more inclusive processes of communication and decision making.

The context for Year Three's research

Year One and Year Two

The research project of which this is the final report – *Regenerating communities: a theological and strategic critique* – was started by the William Temple Foundation in 2002. Our aim was to examine how churches respond and adapt to the challenges presented by the rapid physical, economic, social and cultural shifts of Manchester, which was selected as a typical regional UK city undergoing the transition from an industrial to post-industrial identity in an increasingly global context.

We have aimed to engage with the regeneration and urban renaissance policies of the New Labour government, which have underpinned much of the 'script' to which New Manchester has been rewritten. We planned to research locally - building relationships and listening to those living in these areas – as well as providing a framework for our findings by tying them in with wider academic and policy debates.

From the outset we knew it was important that the voices and experiences of those living in and affected by urban change and regeneration were heard, and so we

decided that our main research method would involve inviting a wide spectrum of people to semi-structured interviews and group discussions so that they could tell us their stories. In all, we engaged the views and experiences of over eighty people at local, regional and national level.

One of our most significant findings concerns the unique way in which churches are contributing to and serving their local communities. These distinctive, faith-inspired contributions are the main focus of this report.

Before moving into a fuller examination of our final year's research and our overall findings, it is helpful to look back at the progress of this research.

Year One – 'Mapping the Boundaries' (published December 2003)

We identified three specific areas in Manchester to be our primary research areas – East Manchester, Wythenshawe and Moss Side/Hulme, each experiencing regeneration in a different way.

Our aim during the first year was to get to know these areas and form relationships there. We spoke to churches from many denominations and traditions; regeneration professionals; other faith leaders; local council workers and community project leaders in order to 'map out' the changes they were undergoing.

Year One findings can be divided into three sections:

- **Background analysis** highlighted the complexity of the urban change that was happening, and showed how global trends were increasingly impacting on local situations. Our research showed (among other things) the proximity of wealth and poverty within previously poor communities, with extensive use of gated housing; the growing fear of crime and associated withdrawal from public space and life; increasing mobility and transience within localities due to global immigration; student populations and professionals frequently moving for work purposes; and the re-branding of areas whose names are associated with crime, or in order to reflect the new sports/leisure/retailing agenda of Manchester.

- **Patterns of church response to regeneration** included a growing sense of disempowerment and frustration from some churches – reflecting their feelings of exclusion from the changes occurring in their areas. We also discerned a sense of anger towards the government as churches felt that they were being exploited to provide free local resources – such as volunteers, leadership and physical space – whilst remaining 'institutionally invisible' when it came to being involved in decisions. However, this first year's research also began to uncover the extent of church contributions to their communities, and the methods which churches were using to engage and serve.

8

- **New theories** began to emerge from our findings which we intended to develop in subsequent years. For example, the concept of a *spectrum of collusion versus collision* referred to the concerns expressed by churches we spoke to about how power is present in relation to the practices of partnership and consultation. Overt *collusion* with the political agenda of central and local government can lead to a sense of disempowerment and loss of identity. Overt *collision* with this agenda can lead to self-imposed marginalisation. Most churches saw engagement with regeneration processes as a careful balancing act between these two extremes. This flexible and balanced approach linked to another developing theory - that of church *hybridity*, or learning to work in an interdisciplinary and networked way which welcomes diversity of approach and partnerships. An important new theory for our future research was of the *different forms of church engagement* within local areas. We provisionally labelled them *local/institutional church, cluster church* and *network church*. We knew that in our future research we wanted to develop our understandings of the ways in which churches relate and contribute to their communities.

Year Two – 'Telling the Stories – how churches are contributing to social capital' (published December 2004)

The second year of our research linked closely to the academic ideas of *civil society* and *social capital*.

Civil society refers to groups of people trying to make things happen for the good of their own or wider communities – these people aren't being motivated primarily by money or the law, but are joining together to try and make a difference. Such activities are like a social 'glue' that holds people and communities together. For example, getting involved in local politics, school parent groups, local economic schemes are all examples of participating in civil society.

Social capital refers to the sets of relationships people have with each other within these groups (be that through family, friends, clubs, churches etc.) and the ways they use these sets of relationships to do things for each other and the wider community. These relationships are like the social 'WD40' which oils the networks of trust and cooperation needed for civil society.

We had observed in our first year's research that churches' contribution to social capital was *distinctive*, sometimes *unique*. The second year focussed on *listening to* church leaders, members and church-based project workers, by attending church services, as well as holding a series of semi-structured interviews and local discussion groups, in order to help us understand more about the contribution of faith communities. We found that the churches were offering a distinctive gift to their communities through their own brand of social capital. In this report we have

described these contributions with the two terms *religious* and *spiritual* capital (see page 12/13).

We concluded that religious and spiritual capital offers many of the same benefits as social capital, but that the underlying beliefs and motivations are distinctively 'church' or 'faith' based.

The Year Two report also suggested that these distinctive church understandings of social capital have created new expressions, or ways of being involved in, civil society. We identified four main ways in which churches are expressing their religious and spiritual capitals – *language, values, ways of working* (methodology), and *theology*.

Year Three – Faith in Action

The aim of this final year of research was to further refine our understanding of the existing eight strands and get a clearer picture of the overlaps and differences between spiritual and religious capital and secular social capital. We also wanted to clarify how the concept of spiritual and religious capital could shape future social policy and governmental debates about the role of faith-based groups in creating sustainable communities.

To do this we held a number of focus group discussions – locally, regionally and nationally. We returned to many of our previous interviewees from Years One and Two in order to give a chance to respond to our findings so far. We also held focus groups in two churches in an area with no previous contact with our research, in order to test out our findings. At local levels, our focus groups included church leaders and members; church-based community project workers; an Islamic social economic development leader; and church funded youth and family workers. Regionally, our focus group included a Northwest Development Agency representative; church leaders; and people involved in faith-based education. Our national groups included central management leaders and thinkers from different faiths; members of church funding, research and policy groups; and interfaith leaders.

Our final year's findings and conclusions are discussed within this report. We believe our findings will resource debate on whether, in faith-based action, faith can be separated from action. We hope our research will enable policy makers and regeneration professionals to better understand the nature and contributions of faith communities. We also hope this report helps resource churches and other faith groups to reflect on the *why* of what they do – and allow them to assert the significance of this alongside their continuing practical engagement with their wider communities.

The relationship between religious and social capital

Before we go on to describe the characteristics of spiritual/religious capital, it is important we understand its relationship to social capital.

Spiritual/religious capital complements the concept of social capital, which refers to the sets of relationships in any organisation or community. The notion of capital suggests that the benefits of these relationships – for example, networking, support, trust, information, - can be stored and used by individuals or groups as a 'resource' when they need it, but also used to contribute to other groups and organisations.

There are three types of social capital.

- *Bonding* social capital refers to those relationships that reinforce similar identities based for example on family, ethnicity, class or gender.
- *Bridging* describes more outward looking relationships that create bridges with other groups of different cultural, social, economic and political status.
- *Linking* measures the ability of an individual or community's networks to 'link up' to other networks to access power and resources that they could not acquire on their own.

Religious capital (and the spiritual capital that energises it) is therefore a resource that individuals and faith groups can access for their own personal well-being, but also 'donate' as a gift to the wider community. It overlaps with ideas of social capital, but it is also distinctive in some important respects (see following section). For example it acknowledges the importance of faith and theological identity as a motivating force for engagement with others – for example the desire to see spiritual as well as physical 'regeneration' within individuals and communities. It will stress the importance of process, as much as outcomes. It often seeks to address issues of power and injustice in a challenging prophetic way. Sometimes it will stress the importance of just 'being there' within communities. Volunteering, simple hospitality, and reluctance to assume that power is always the right way to achieve results, are all alternative ways of providing capital that can 'bond', 'bridge' and 'link' but not necessarily in measurable and predictable ways. Ultimately, spiritual and religious capital says that faith is an inescapable component of political and community life, and that it is time to engage with it seriously rather than trying to make fit into pre-existing categories.

Our understanding of religious capital expands that of Pierre Bourdieu who sees it as a resource that individuals access by participating in a religious group. We interpret religious capital as the public interaction of faith-based groups with wider society rather than the creation of a more 'efficient' religious person.

Spiritual and religious capital

We describe spiritual/religious capital in terms of eighteen 'strands' which we summarise below and later explore more fully.

11

Spiritual capital refers to the values, ethics, beliefs and vision which faith communities bring to civil society at the global and local level. It also refers to the holistic vision for change held within an individual person's set of beliefs. Spiritual capital in this form can be described as more *liquid* than solid because it relates to intangibles such as ideas and visions and is not exclusively claimed by a specific religious tradition.

1. Focuses on transforming people personally and spiritually, as well as improving their area physically - and has an over-arching hope that this transformation will occur.

2. Values personal stories, especially about how individual 'regeneration' occurs.

3. Believes implicitly or explicitly that God is at work within regeneration and civil society.

4. Accepts that there's a lot of strong emotion felt and expressed when working for healthy communities – for example, anger, frustration, cynicism, weariness, fragility – and acknowledges the importance and significance of 'feelings'.

5. Introduces the values of self-emptying, forgiveness, transformation, risk-taking and openness to learning.

6. Begins with the intention of accepting those who have been rejected elsewhere.

7. Values people's inner resources - seeing people as capable of creating their own solutions to their problems.

Religious capital reflects the pragmatic and functional outworkings of spiritual capital and so can be described as the *solid* dimension. Religious capital is put into practice by faiths - in institutional or network form – supporting practical work within their own communities, as well as participating in other areas of social and public life for the benefit of wider society.

8. Aims to help people to communicate deeply, e.g. recognising the importance of saying sorry, and forgiveness.

9. Aims to create mechanisms which allow people directly affected by changes in their area to have a say in decisions taken.

10. Is prepared to challenge what others – including creators of theories - accept as the norm, as part of a critical rather than an uncritical consensus.

11. Fosters the responsibility to be prophetic in situations of injustice.

12. Involves commitment to involvement in education – to educate children and engage the community.

13. Provides physical space in which community engagement can happen.

14. Provides local leadership of projects and community programmes.

15. Offers (Christian) norms, values and 'rules' for living which are distinctively different to those of the marketplace or government.

16. Understands that individuals (within the church) are religious capital's main resources – and so invests in them.

17. Commits to the local via deeper and long-term relationships that recognise the potential of local people.

18. Uses language and theology flexibly in order to work for the benefit of the wider good.

Strands of spiritual and religious capital

We now move from a brief headline description of each strand to a more in-depth examination. These strands, when woven together, create the fabric of spiritual and religious capital – they help us to understand some of the character traits of these two capitals

Spiritual strands are considered first as it is from them that the religious strands emerge.

Spiritual strands

Strand 1. Hope and transformation - focuses on transforming people personally and spiritually, as well as improving their area physically - and has an over-arching hope that this transformation will occur

This strand expresses the belief that people do not necessarily have to have a religion in order to be spiritual. The belief that all humans were created by God, and so have a spiritual aspect of their being was expressed by those we spoke to. Therefore, addressing the spiritual needs of people was seen to be as crucial in regeneration as changing physical factors. A person's spiritual well-being was highlighted as a crucial factor in that person's wider health and happiness, and many of our respondents felt that this has been ignored in much regeneration.

Hope - offering an over-arching narrative of hope for a better future

In contexts of regeneration, offering hope for a better future was seen as a crucially important and a distinctive role of the church. Faith communities are seen as bringing a 'vision and hope that transcends what the ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime

Minister) manual could ever say', and a key role for them is to 'waken and sustain hope'. Christians, or other people of faith, as individual conduits of spiritual capital, are seen as bringing 'hope into hopeless' situations and offering a deep hope for the future to suffering and marginalised people.

The hope and 'better future' on offer through spiritual capital was articulated as occurring through the transformation of people, and was a dominant theme throughout many discussions. Our respondents asserted that where people are looking for a better future through hoping to win the lottery or lose weight, the spiritual capital on offer through the church provides a more deep-seated, qualitative change.

Transformation - a commitment to transformation and understanding that transformed people become transformers of their communities

The theme of hope was often closely linked to transformation - of people, areas and communities. The transformation of church members - through participation in the believing community as well as through spiritual teaching and influences – is seen as a way of 'spreading' this positive transformation outside the church as individuals engage with the wider community: 'Church members should be able to transform wherever they are, by bringing hope into hopeless situations'. The transformation described by those we spoke to refers to a deep-down inner change, not simply a 'band aid' or quick-fix solution. Implied criticism is directed here at government and the regeneration industry who promise change, but fail to address the long-term well-being of individuals: 'Politicians throw money at the 'yobs' to try and change them, but they're not focussing on their personal transformation'. There was criticism of the 'cosmetic' regeneration of areas, where the external façade is improved, but the needs of the community are disregarded.

There was also self-directed criticism from some respondents when discussing transformation. The 'transformative core' of religious capital was seen as the individuals within faith groups, and it was recognised that more needs to be done by churches to resource their leaders and members. However, the dominant hope of our respondents was the transformation of whole communities, as well as individuals, and this was being attempted through many of the programmes and activities they are physically resourcing. In addition to practical action, the role of prayer in transformation was highlighted – 'Church members can pray to transform attitudes and lives – sometimes even miraculously'. Reaching out and engaging with those normally excluded from processes of change and regeneration was highlighted as vital, as 'people need to be involved to be transformed'. The aim of transformation of individuals and communities is a clear example of Christian theology at work alongside action.

Strand 2. Values personal stories, especially about how individual 'regeneration' occurs

This strand introduces the important concept of stories and personal narrative. In contexts of rapid change and regeneration, communities can be scattered and a sense of real connection or 'rootedness' with the local environment can be lost. In these

cases, the re-telling of personal stories and memories becomes significant for the identity and history of the community. We found many such examples of oral traditions being passed between individuals and within churches.

Stories of individual regeneration and change are especially important. Encouraging the wider community with examples of how people's lives have changed for the better fosters the hope in transformation described above. This also demonstrates clearly the value placed on individuals within communities – the message that every member is valued and individually treasured is clearly communicated by this retelling of stories about individual regeneration.

Strand 3. Believes implicitly or explicitly that God is at work within regeneration and civil society

There was a marked variety within different churches and groups in how explicitly they asserted that God was at work within the processes occurring around them. However, a clear sense was prevalent –sometimes only implicitly – that God's Spirit is at work within the wider world, including the regeneration industry. Some respondents expressed this as the belief that God is working through human beings, and thus regeneration and church work done by individuals is affected by the will of God.

Other respondents linked this to wider debates about the differences and overlap between spiritual/religious capital and secular civil society. This was expressed through the belief that God's Spirit is not confined to the church and is able to work through secular groups as well as faith-based ones. Faced then with the question of differences between secular and religious capital, respondents agreed that a distinctive role of faith groups was to reflect in action and be conscious of the fact of God's presence at work in the wider world.

Strand 4. Accepts that there is a lot of strong emotion felt and expressed when working for healthy communities - for example; anger, frustration, cynicism, weariness, fragility – and acknowledges the importance and significance of 'feelings'

The feelings and emotions of individuals are valued within spiritual capital – not seen simply as 'vague' or irrelevant, but as powerful and of central importance. Many of the churches and church-based groups we spent time with had encountered strong feelings from their members and others as a result of the changes in their area. In situations where there is much sadness, weariness or anger (among other feelings) the churches had committed to viewing these as significant, and not something to be ignored in order to 'get on with the task'.

Communicating feelings – 'heart to heart, soul to soul' – is viewed as a strong and an important task of spiritual capital. Within spiritual capital, the value of people's real feeling is paramount. This partly comes from the desire to allow local people to 'have a say' and be happy with the changes occurring in their area, and also affirms the

value of the individual and her/his opinion. However, our respondents highlighted that to some regeneration professionals economic viabilities were of highest significance, and expressed sadness at this whilst acknowledging that such people are 'operating within a system' and so have no option but to put such concerns first. The point of dissonance between spiritual capital and other groups, our respondents asserted, was the recognition that people matter more than money, and that a 'clear economic plan or strategy' does not always suit the best interests of a community.

One respondent described a difficulty with faith groups and other groups working together by using Karl Popper's 'clocks/clouds' metaphor. For spiritual capital, taking the feelings and opinions of individuals seriously means working in a 'cloud' way, i.e. in a fluid, changing, creative way. Meanwhile, for other groups, such as the regeneration industry or local and national government, the prime objective is economic success and this requires working in a 'clock' way, i.e. in a fixed, mechanical and predictable way. A problem occurs when these two approaches attempt to work in partnership – and this can lead to frustration and lack of understanding. It is not possible to 'shoe-horn' clouds into clock shapes, and likewise people's feelings cannot always be adequately addressed in economic strategies which put profits before individuals' happiness.

Case Study - vulnerability and suffering as part of religious capital

An example from our second year research of openness to vulnerability and suffering as almost inevitable products of religious capital, came from an Anglican church in Wythenshawe. As part of a long tradition of community engagement in what was until recently designated the poorest ward in England, a Learn Direct scheme was established and ran from the church hall. However, after a series of criminal incidents, the project was closed. The vicar described this process - and the project's re-launch:
'.. We had all these burglaries last year, and in that I was very aware of the cross and how actually we are called to be faithful in spite of the painfulness ... and I suppose that when the Learn Direct Centre which had been going so well was closed down by the carjacking in January that was a real sense of death and loss and brokenness.' After a period of soul-searching, members of the community started asking her *'Is there anything we can do to get Learn Direct started again?'* and it struck her that *'the whole point of the cross is that you accept the suffering, that you are involved with it, because there is something more important and better ... the PCC were clear that if they reopened the Learn Direct centre, they were choosing to be burgled again ... Reality is what that means – to take up our Cross, but that is what as a Christian community we're called to do.'*

Strand 5. Introduces to the more general definition of social capital the values of self-emptying, forgiveness, transformation, risk-taking and openness to learning

Many powerful examples of the embodiment of the values mentioned above emerged from our research. Actions which involve risk, sacrifice and vulnerability were frequently articulated as responses to a theology of suffering servanthood and a desire to emulate the life and actions of Christ. The Biblical instruction to 'take up your cross' was often cited by churches experiencing hardship to explain why they choose to keep trying to engage with their community rather than withdraw or become only inwardly focussed.

Churches that choose to serve potentially dangerous and volatile groups of people provided some examples of risk, but other forms of relationship which were seen as entailing risk were those partnerships with secular agencies which could threaten the church's identity or force a church to deny its religious capital. There was heightened awareness of such risks amongst many of those we spoke to throughout our research. However, our respondents had generally chosen to take this risk to their identity in order to facilitate partnership which would serve the needs of the wider community.

Strand 6. Begins with the intention of accepting those who have been rejected elsewhere

Whilst other groups may be open only to certain people, our respondents asserted that one aspect of spiritual capital is the acceptance and inclusion of everybody. This links to the value of seeing all life as sacred, and committing to love and serve all as a result, but this unconditional acceptance also brings elements of vulnerability and sacrifice. There is a commitment to serve the community, even when the community appears to reject the church – or when individuals within a community threaten and attack the church. This strand was evident in the 'self-emptying' finding of our second year research – to keep forgiving and accepting whilst realising that the church's building/projects may suffer as a result. The unconditional acceptance of all individuals means accepting the best and worst possibilities of a person – and re-inviting and re-accepting them even if they abuse this.

Case Study - Accepting those rejected elsewhere

A small Baptist community in East Manchester hosts a variety of self–help groups including those experiencing mental health issues. As part of its service it offers reflexology and aromatherapy on a drop-in basis through a qualified practice nurse. There appears to be a close relationship between the church community and 'its' client groups – the apparent vulnerability and fragility of the church community creates a non-threatening space that feels safe for those most vulnerable. The continued use of the building by needy client groups reinforces a sense of usefulness and relevance for the church community, even though there is always the threat of imminent withdrawing of funding or closure of the building. A brand new health centre has opened in the area offering a range of hi-tech services. Careful listening to the views of the residents reveals that this new health centre is unpopular. Local people feel intimidated by the brisk efficiency of the approach and the smart but utilitarian feel of the building. They have trouble meeting appointments and following health regimes. The 'health care' offered at the church is distinctly low-tech – a massage table in the middle of a jumbled space offered on a drop in basis. But it connects – it feels homely.

Strand 7. Values people's inner resources – seeing people as creating their own solutions to their problems

This strand relates to the belief that people are made in the image of a creator God, and so by nature are creative beings. Communities were described as being made up of 'sense-ual' people – seeing, hearing, thinking individuals with the ability to help themselves if supported to do so. Examples of churches putting this belief into practice as part of religious capital are the many new local initiatives to allow communities to be heard in regeneration processes. Further examples are the networks and support groups established, in which church members may have acted as 'catalysts' for starting the empowerment process, but subsequent 'ownership' and creative developments have been undertaken by wider community members.

Spiritual capital creates opportunities for people to express their creativity in devising their own solutions to problems. This leads to people becoming more than simple 'reactors' to what goes on around them, and enables pro-activity in shaping their own futures.

Religious strands

Strand 8. Aims to help people to communicate deeply, e.g. recognises the importance of saying sorry, and forgiveness

This strand practically embodies the value outlined in Strand 4 above relating to the significance of feelings and the strong emotion often experienced in areas undergoing regeneration. We encountered a number of practical examples in which churches had facilitated processes of repentance and forgiveness. As a result of the 'channels' churches created 'strategic things happened' concluded one respondent, indicating that this process 'freed up' people from entrenched positions and allowed them to work together for a common purpose in the future.

In these cases, the churches and church-based projects were able to bring together disputing groups and become the 'catalyst' for their resolved relationships. Allowing people to acknowledge the significance of their feelings has proved to be an important practical task of the churches in the areas we focussed our research in.

Strand 9. Aims to create mechanisms which allow people directly affected by changes in their area to have a say in decisions taken.

As above, this strand has entailed church members and leaders acting as catalysts for change – perhaps providing physical space where people can meet those in charge of changes in their area, or speaking on behalf of the wider community in meetings with regeneration professionals. There was much frustration expressed within our discussions about the perceived 'tick box' approach to consultation sometimes employed by the regeneration industry. This refers to the feeling that decisions are

made before the community is consulted, and that faith groups are superficially included in order to 'tick the faith box'.

Strand 10. Is prepared to challenge what others, including creators of theories, accept as the norm, as part of a critical rather than an uncritical consensus

This strand came across clearly in many of our second year semi-structured interviews as well as our third year focus groups. An underlying unease with accepting the 'official line' was frequently expressed. Respondents were frequently keen to enter into discussion and debate with the assumptions and ethos lying behind much of the regeneration happening in their areas. Within our research groups, this never progressed to a refusal to work in partnership, but was an obvious and firm commitment to challenge and question a lot of what was presented as 'fact'.

Case Study – Challenging and critiquing accepted norms and theories

One church-based community empowerment project demonstrated the way in which religious capital can critique and question the accepted norms, theories and ways of working of other groups. Our interviewees described how some regeneration professionals appear to have a 'missionary-style approach' when they arrive in a community and tell the existing residents and organisations how to improve themselves and their lives. There was a tangible sense of frustration at this attitude of judgment, and the interviewees also critiqued the 'colonialisation processes' as the 'regeneration bandwagon rolls into town' with its own agendas and plans for the area: *I don't mean this nastily, personally, but look at [Mr. X] at the New Deal for Communities ... as a missionary kind of figure, you know, in all kinds of terms. The man that has come to save our area, and the way the residents relate to him is like a priest in some respects, they defer to his wisdom. And he comes and presides at meetings, there's loads of imagery like that.'

Much of this sentiment appeared to be linked to the desire to be viewed and treated as equal partners within partnerships. Rather than a passive, reactive church, many of our respondents presented themselves and their churches/church-based projects as proactively seeking a critical, questioning relationship with the political, economic and social assumptions lying behind much of the change in their area. Perhaps partly due to this desire to be involved as critical partners, many of those we spoke to had become closely involved in the processes of change and regeneration – often leading community groups, and representing these at professional regeneration industry meetings and consultations. This strand links to the prophetic responsibilities articulated in Strand 4, but is distinctive in that it seeks to reach a questioning consensus which allows partnership in addition to critique.

Strand 11. Fosters the responsibility to be prophetic in situations of injustice

This theme was a dominant concern and frequently articulated within the focus groups. The responsibility to 'be prophetic', also described as 'agitating' and 'challenging', is clearly a central concern of churches as part of their practice of

religious capital. This mainly related to a sense that it is not sufficient simply to help individuals and the community with problems after they have occurred, but that the church should be challenging and seeking to address the wider issues which are causing these problems in the first place. There is clearly a balance to be drawn here, between addressing the wider issues and helping those who are affected by them. One respondent described this as the duty to 'mop up' versus the duty to prevent 'mess' in the first place. This sense of duty to be prophetic – 'affirming what is good, whilst challenging what is bad' – will sometimes call for the church and other faith-based groups to be critical, and sometimes to accept being unpopular.

Attempting to 'be like the prophets – and show that we're all equal' calls for practical action. Whilst those we spoke to were committed to changing the 'bigger picture' by challenging government and other groups (through political involvement, partnership with NGO's and local schemes to allow marginalized voices to be heard), there was also much evidence of local projects to practically address the problems caused by wider issues. For example, one church described how, realising there were no banking facilities on their estate and that local people were borrowing from 'loan-sharks', they set up a credit union in the church building, and established a 'Money-matters' course to help people deal with their finances. Some respondents were resigned, however, to the fact that until 'basic economic injustices' in this country are redressed, no amount of hard work by the churches or other groups will solve the problems of poverty and exclusion. 'The protestant work ethic just doesn't ring true in disadvantaged areas', one respondent emphasised, 'We need resources in the area to be able to sustain projects – hard work alone won't keep things going'.

Strand 12. Involves commitment to involvement in education – to educate children and engage the community

The role of churches in educating children – both in faith schools and outside school activities was seen as a vital role of and major source of religious capital. Parents within and outside the believing community perceive the church as having 'something' they want their children to have, and so send their children to faith schools and church in order to receive this. This 'something' was described as spiritual teaching and morals, as well as a set of values that are different to the rest of the world. The churches take this role seriously, whilst one respondent was resigned to the fact that this is often 'a short-lived idealism for parents', forsaken as the child grows up. The importance of education and faith schools was seen as significant by our respondents as these are a 'major way that we are engaging with the community'. Developing and sustaining links with parents and children through education was seen as an important way of 'spreading' the effects of religious capital into the wider community.

Strand 13. Provides physical space in which community engagement can happen

An important aspect of religious capital is providing the spaces in which projects can be run, relationships built and transformation begin to occur. 'Churches provide spaces, capital in physical terms ... this is the space where things happen, where people are transformed.' Our Muslim respondent highlighted that 'Mosque' means 'to

sit', and described the mosque as a place to sit, discuss and chat as well as to pray. This use of sacred space as transformative is very significant – it shows the faith groups physically resourcing the outworking of the values which motivate their engagement.

The use of sacred space does not mean the exclusion of those who do not attend the church. Church buildings are frequently used for the many activities and resources run by churches themselves, but our respondents also spoke of their secular partners who use their church building as a base for their projects. An important motif which emerged was the use of sacred space to 'convene', or bring together, disparate elements of communities, in addition to providing opportunities for communities to meet representatives of the groups who are working in their area.

Strand 14. Provides local leadership of projects and community programmes

A large number of our respondents highlighted that without religious capital, and the associated leadership of church leaders and members, many community projects would 'fold'. One respondent estimated that in his local area 50-60 per cent of leaders of community programmes were church-based people. Another asserted that if religious people are taken out of regeneration partnerships, there are not many people left. The faith groups appear to be a source of leadership for secular projects, as well as faith-based ones, and this contribution of leadership is an important aspect of religious capital. One reason for this is that churches are often the main community group in an area – one example given was that within a Housing Association no members of staff live in the area, whilst all of the church is based locally. This, in addition to many of the values outlined above, provides an impetus for church members to get involved in local leadership.

It was also noted in relation to this theme that if those leading projects are not sufficiently supported, the projects will suffer as a result. The concern for one respondent was that this may form a downward spiral of individuals and community, 'If support mechanisms are not there for individuals who are leading in the locality, the individual will suffer, and therefore the process will also suffer. What could support them? Strong communities, but these are being eroded.' One solution offered to such concerns was the continuing commitment of faith groups to work in partnership with secular organisations. This was highlighted in our second year research, and was again an important theme for many of our respondents – 'We can be an important service provider if we work in partnership, for example, other agencies can provide publicity which we can't'.

Strand 15. Offers Christian norms, values and 'rules' for living different from those of the marketplace or government

One characteristic of religious capital is the commitment to offer 'values and norms which are different to the normal blend'. One respondent spoke of having a 'shifted world view' which informs a different approach to people, whilst another asserted that 'profit, power and status are the values of capitalism – we need to say that these aren't ours'. The theologically informed values that the church holds inform the way it

works, whilst also making it distinctive. Where communities are increasingly broken or fragmented, religious capital offers 'wholeness'. This holistic approach of being concerned for every aspect of a person's life – practical, moral, spiritual – leads to religious capital having a different set of criteria when approaching the transformation of a community. Instead of focussing on external 'beautification', it starts with the question, 'What could make living here more worthwhile?'.

Strand 16. Understands that individuals within the church are religious capital's main resources and so invests in them

Realising that religious capital is taken out into the wider community through 'osmosis', as church members engage with others in their area, is an important principle within the churches of those we spoke to. There was a clear recognition that people in their day-to-day lives, not institutions or management structures, should be 'equipped', 'fed' and 'invested in' so that they can do this effectively. The wider, institutional church was seen as playing an important role in encouraging individuals to take up certain issues and be aware of societal problems, and the local church also plays a vital role in investing in its members to 'change the world where they are'. When individuals are equipped to do this effectively, the church becomes 'greater than the sum of its parts' as religious capital benefits the wider community. Individuals within the church are also seen as holding wisdom about the best ways to approach community engagement as a wider church, in particular elderly people, 'who have been in the area for the long-haul'.

One way of investing in the church community to equip them for 'outside' engagement is through spiritual teaching and deepening their understanding and experience of the Christian faith. One respondent highlighted that 'it's uncontroversial to affirm that the role of the church is to proclaim Jesus', and asserted the significance of having a congregation that believes and understands how faith in Jesus can transform lives. Another respondent described the need for churches to make time to strengthen their 'spiritual capital' alongside their 'religious capital'. Although religious capital is a 'bridging' capital – making links which bridge differences between people – it is also important for churches not to neglect their 'bonding' capital, strengthening the ties that make them a strong church. 'We can't only invest in those outside the church, we should try and have 'spiritual capital' in abundance.'

Strand 17. Commits to the local through deeper and long-term relationships that recognise the potential of local people

Whilst other agencies and the government are criticised for 'pandering to the academic, glossy and sexy', faith groups – embedded as they are in the local situation – 'know the textures of that world'. Knowing these 'textures' –the problems and hopes of that area – in addition to physically living there themselves, faith groups are often uniquely placed to meaningfully engage with and resource their communities. Religious communities are seen as being far more connected with their communities than the government could ever be, and have a deeply rooted, long-term commitment to the welfare of their area.

In addition to recognising the problems within the local, and attempting to address the needs and hurts of the community, churches also have a love and care for their area based on their historical links with it. Many individuals who have been in a church for many years will have seen the community change and develop, and want to ensure its well-being for their family and friends as well as themselves. Locally placed, churches can observe the diversity within communities, and see the multi-layered resources and problems present. As one respondent said, 'In the local there is all the riches of the universe', and religious capital is well placed to channel these riches for the community's benefit.

Strand 18. Uses language and theology flexibly for the benefit of the wider good

From discussions in the focus groups, it is clear that there is a spectrum of opinion on how the church should communicate and relate to others. Whilst some respondents were clear that churches should be immersed in the wider world, and shouldn't separate or alienate themselves through using 'church-y' language, others believed that the church should be distinct from the wider world, and be explicit in theological language and motivation. This links to differing opinions about whether churches should stress *how* they do things, and focus on pragmatics, or emphasise *why* they do things, and focus on the faith that drives this. In the majority of cases, some level of compromise between these two views had been reached. However, whilst the opinions differed on a theoretical level about how to communicate values and theology – all the examples provided about practical action within communities, regardless of theological persuasion, showed that the motivations and faith behind engagement stayed largely implicit in day-to-day practice. This was not due to theological motivations being seen as unimportant, but because the primary aim was to engage the community and work for its health and happiness.

Our research suggests that *spiritual and religious* capital:

- Are local and therefore contextual - a dynamic and potentially unpredictable element in local life. Overarching and vague blueprints as to what they are and how they operate should therefore be resisted.

- Highlight the importance of language and theological identity - elements which have hitherto been ignored within wider policy and political debates.

- May actively critique or even disengage from the mainstream political consensus.

Government rhetoric on civil society, social capital and regeneration has given the churches a new language and identity (which some have eagerly embraced) as a way of reasserting a sense of relevance for themselves within urban contexts. However, the deliberate use of religious language and appeal to spiritual values contained within government rhetoric has produced a sense of confusion and cynicism amongst church groups who see this as a cynical ploy to get their resources and expertise 'on the

cheap' while the government and economic partners still hold the levers of real power.

Spiritual and religious capital – a critique of the concepts

Spiritual and religious capital are both developing concepts, and we asked our focus group members to tell us about any concerns or critique of these terms which they could offer. The main problems with the idea of spiritual/ religious capital which we encountered were:

The language of 'spiritual and religious' capital

Many participants in our focus groups felt that the term 'religious capital' was exclusive and inappropriate. Dominant concerns included the feeling that 'religious capital' is too detached a term for what is actually happening – it was described as 'institutional', 'hierarchical', 'academic' and confusing to the majority of people. 'Religious' was seen as taking away from the importance of faith and personal belief in what is happening due to its association with institutions and corporate rather than personal activity, and many of our Christian respondents said they would not like to be described as 'religious', seeing this as having Pharisaic-faith type connotations. Meanwhile, 'capital' was criticised as a term which implies that the relationships and community action which is being described can somehow be 'counted', 'multiplied' or 'stored up for future use'. The term 'religious capital' was described as 'not really conveying the incredible strength of what's happening – heart to heart, soul to soul'.

'One-size-fits-all' expectation. Some respondents highlighted that each church or faith-based group has its own 'type' of religious capital. This point resonated with our Year Two findings that different groups were expressing their religious capital in different ways. The diversity of the church – and the fact that some churches appear to have no religious capital at all – was commented on.

Absence of non-Christian angle. Due to funding and size limitations, we were able to focus only on Christian examples of religious/spiritual capital – although we have been able to include some representatives from other faiths in our final year focus groups. For some of our respondents, this linked in with concerns that the government does not realise or take account of the difference between faith groups. We hope that future research may allow for further exploration of the different religious/spiritual capital of different faiths.

Boundary between religious/spiritual capital and secular civil society. Some respondents questioned whether religious/spiritual capital was different from values and practices at work within secular groups. It was raised that Strand 3 (above) may be the only distinctive contribution of religion to this type of civil society, and that if, as Christians believe, God is at work within the wider world – why is religious/spiritual capital expressed within faith groups only? However, the majority of people agreed that churches' and other church based groups' contributed in a distinctive way to civil society.

24

Barriers to religious capital

In addition to expanding our definition and description of religious capital, the national and local focus groups highlighted certain barriers to it. These barriers put obstacles in the way of churches getting what they need in order to fulfil the aims of religious capital.

1. Money/funding problems

There was a belief expressed by many respondents that aspiring to the practices of religious capital is not sufficient - faith groups also need money in order to achieve their potential in their communities. 'Yes, we may have religious capital, but given our revenue problems, how much can we apply it?' This inadequacy of funding is also linked to government disconnection with religious bodies noted above. Some we spoke to felt that their local work received inadequate funding from government (local and national) and the institutional church, even though both have recently redirected resources to more deprived areas and churches. Hard work alone will not sustain the work of churches in religious capital – they need money to resource and support their projects.

2. Some level of disconnection from/frustration with institutional church

Some churches reported feelings of frustration, not just with government regeneration policies and philosophies, but also with the institutional church and wider church management structures. There was evidence of certain churches feeling unsupported as well as supported by the institutional church, and that this lack of support was 'hindering the breaking of new ground'. There was understanding expressed that the wider church is often 'trapped' by resourcing issues, and a sense of sadness that lack of money can sometimes inhibit local churches from being able to 'practice what they preach'.

Representatives from national church leadership expressed some frustration that 'old rules' can inhibit the wider institution from engaging in certain ways. However, there was a generally higher level of confidence within national management structures that government is aware of and values the work done by churches. This confidence was noticeably more absent from local churches.

3. Misunderstanding and lack of support Relationship/lack of support from government

A significant issue here is that in order to receive government funding, faith groups are often required to 'disguise' or ignore their values and motivations even though these values are part of what makes religious capital distinctive and valuable. One respondent noted that the churches have lots of experience and knowledge of the local, which could work in partnership with the government's agendas very well. However, 'the churches shouldn't have to take on the government agenda themselves', not least because government often promotes a secularist ideology.

Rather, the partnership must be equal and funding respect the distinctiveness and contribution of the faith communities.

A problem for many churches and church-based projects is that they feel that the government wants them to provide all the benefits of religious capital without the religion. This, our respondents felt, diminishes their contribution by reducing it to wider social capital.

The focus group members felt that their contribution is being divided up and the value of religious capital as a whole was being ignored – 'I'd say to government, don't pigeonhole us, don't compartmentalise us – take the whole lot or not at all. Take our whole package, don't just cherry pick to fit your policies'. In addition to endangering the religious capital created by the churches, this threatens the 'bonding' capital which is so necessary for the success of wider community engagement. One respondent told us how lack of funding means that local churches have no time or energy left to concentrate on their internal strength.

A further problem in relationships with the government is the persisting feeling that faith groups are consulted in only a superficial, 'tick box approach' way. Our respondents felt that they were often involved in government plans too late in the process to be able to feed into them in any meaningful way, and there was frustration expressed that the government appears not to be listening to faith communities, despite expecting them to provide various aspects of social capital. The day-to-day role of the churches was seen as being overlooked, and the churches only consulted in times of crisis or upheaval. This dysfunctional relationship caused considerable sadness and frustration, as churches see the strength of working in partnership with the government, but need to be accepted as more equal partners with differences and strengths to offer. This would expand the potential of religious capital, and so improve the capability of churches to help their local communities.

Conclusions

We believe that our three years' locally based research, and the conclusions we have been able to draw from this work, contribute significantly to the theoretical and policy field of this increasingly important area of social and political development. Although we have stressed the practical significance of religious capital - flowing as it does from spiritual capital – and have recommended policies that will further refine its 'operative' usefulness, we feel it important to end this report with two important points.

The first is that religious capital should not simply be seen as a 'bankable commodity' that can be stored, counted or controlled. Rather it is being continuously created within a society increasingly interested in and shaped by the values of faith and spirituality. The influence of faith on wider society is in some ways an unexpected turn of events – after all, the largely secular social and political fields of thought assumed (along the lines of secularisation theory in the 1960s and 1970s) that religion would cease to have any significant public impact in the 21st century. It is becoming ever more apparent that this is not, in fact, the case.

Our second concluding point highlights the paradoxical situation of the church in the contemporary context. At this point of continued institutional decline (at least within mainstream Christianity) religious capital is being given increasing space by the wider social and political 'order' to influence the shape of future debate about the nature of community, belonging and the values that shape economic and political policy. It is also being given the space to contribute practically to these agendas, and even in some cases to be held up as a model of good or exemplary practice. From a church (and wider faith) based perspective, religious capital represents a *progressive* spiral of influence and growth that contrasts with the apparently *regressive* spiral of institutional decline. The prevalence and proven effectiveness of religious capital – energised by spiritual capital's value system, moral vision and basis in faith – demonstrates that the mainstream faiths are continuing their long tradition of engagement with wider society and their commitment to serving communities.