

Spiritual Capital and Economies of Grace: Redefining the Relationship between Religion and the Welfare State

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This article traces the trajectory of UK government social policy since World War Two, with particular reference to the shifts in the past 10 to 15 years towards concepts such as multi-level governance, localism, the Third Way and the Big Society. It describes the shifting relationships between institutional religion and the State during that period, tracking the 'return of faith' in government policy and social welfare as it seeks to address a number of intractable social and economic issues related to cohesion and inequality, as well as a perceived absence of moral and ethical norms within public life. The article proposes a set of new analytical concepts (based on recent empirical research from the US and the UK) which seek to describe and evaluate this new 'post-secular' relationship between faith and government. The article concludes that the new 'post-welfare' landscape will continue to play well to the existing strengths and positionalities of religion, faith and spirituality in the UK as the twenty-first century moves into its second decade.

Keywords: Post-welfare, post-secular, religious and spiritual capital, virtue economy, localism, governance.

Introduction

This article addresses the current state of play between religion and social welfare in the UK, with a view to identifying present and potential trends via a three stage argument. First, it traces the trajectory of welfare provision in the UK since the Second World War up to the present age, but focussing on the last ten to fifteen years, which have seen an acceleration from a social democratic to a liberal form of welfare provision, with an emphasis on deregulation, decentralisation and consumer choice. Multi-level governance and Third Way approaches have morphed into further ideas of localism, civil economies and the Big Society as a counterbalance to the Big State. Ideas of virtue, subsidiarity and social enterprise appear to characterise this more recent approach.

Second, the article addresses how religion has re-emerged into the public square as an important political and cultural force through a variety of converging trends, including immigration, post-material searching and the problematising of religion following global terrorist attacks claiming religious justification.

Third, three exploratory typologies of renewed religious engagement in civil society and social welfare are offered as potential tools of analysis in what is now a fluid and complex field. These theories are: economies of grace (and their three modalities of social welfare engagement, including 'being there', 'mainstream' and 'alternative'); religious and spiritual capital; and spaces of rapprochement between religious and secular social actors.

The trajectory of social care in the UK: from Big State to the Big Society

The trajectory of social welfare in the UK has a clear genealogy of ideas best summed up by the emergence towards the end of the 1990s of the word 'governance' as a replacement for 'government'. As Pierre and Peters reflect, 'Governance has become important due to changes in society . . . and the new governance is a strategy to link the contemporary state to contemporary society' (quoted in Stoker, 2004: 10). According to Stoker (2004), the history of institutional government in post-war Britain has gone through three distinct phases. The first, the immediate post-war phase, witnessed the establishment and delivery of public services by local authorities within a national welfare state. The public sector had the monopoly on decision-making, expertise and delivery. The 1970s and 1980s, primarily under the influence of Conservative administrations, saw the shift to a new public management system which forced local authorities to become more responsive to the needs of local customers and adapt to more competitive tendering. The third phase has been emerging since the mid-1990s, with an increased emphasis on the concept of localism; 'namely . . . the key task for local government is to meet the needs of its community, either directly or indirectly' (Stoker, 2004: 14). This last shift has entailed a networked rather than tight form of governance, working within a complex set of relationships at different levels of civil society.

The practice of working across boundaries and meeting the multiple needs of multiple constituencies was summed up in the concept of the Third Way – the philosophical and social policy cornerstone of New Labour (1997–2010). As well as a multi-levelled localism, the Third Way also sought to preserve the autonomy of the individual as a rational, self-reflexive being; a project clearly indebted to the ongoing legacy of the secular Enlightenment. In the early 1990s, Anthony Giddens, New Labour's philosopher of choice (Giddens, 1998), posited the theory of the reflexive project of the self as the new basis of social life and social policy. The notion of the self is no longer something 'fixed' that we inherit. Rather, it is a narrative or biography that we constantly update about ourselves which is capable of being explained to other people and integrating events that take place in the external world (Giddens, 1991). Therefore, Giddens advised, any government that did not take into account the significance of individual choice was doomed to electoral failure.

However, as a centre-left party, New Labour wanted to expand this notion of the individual beyond the neo-liberal market model of economic man or woman into something that allowed the self-fulfilling individual *to express their choice within the wider context of civil society*. The political hallmarks of the Third Way can be summarised thus:

- A belief that there can be no alternative to the market economy
- A celebration of the contribution of civil society
- A commitment to a continuing, if different role for the State. (Stoker, 2004: 50)

With the downfall of New Labour in 2010, and the arrival of a Conservative-dominated coalition government, the trajectory of welfare reform established since the late 1990s continues. We now have a centre-right version of the Third Way in the form of Blond's social and political manifesto, *Red Tory*. Blond describes the historic failure of both the Keynesian left and the Monetarist right. The former's vision of the universalist welfare state simply created a supplicant class of citizens, cut off from earlier working-class ambition and aspiration (Blond, 2010: 15). Meanwhile, Margaret Thatcher's purist

monetarism, whilst bringing in necessary public sector reform, went too far and had too many unintended consequences,

Instead of a popular capitalism with open and free markets, what we got instead was a capitalism captured by concentrations of capital and a market monopolised by vested interest and the dominance of the already wealthy . . . and the evisceration of the . . . public realm. (2010: 18–19)

Blond’s astute analysis is, however, dissipated by a flawed set of solutions. He first advocates the reclaiming of a virtue economy. ‘Virtue is the means by which people fulfil the socially recognised goals they are attempting to reach. Virtue is value and practice combined’ (2010: 160). Blond however, never identifies what those virtues are. Rather, he implies that whatever your virtues are is okay, ‘If for example, you believe in love as the basis of human relationships, then you can’t treat men or women as dispensable items on the road to your own satisfaction’ (2010: 160).

Blond’s narrative then wanders into some broad-based ideas on the importance of the restoration of ‘ethos’ (a slippery term at best) for the civil realm. Similarly, the ‘moral market’ simply seems to boil down to extolling the virtues of subsidiarity based on weakly defined notions of sympathy (2010: 194). This emphasis on subsidiarity leads to the unique positioning of locally based social enterprise as the main delivery vehicle for a post-welfare state. But is this simply neo-liberalism by the back door – in which large Faith-based and Community and Voluntary Service organisations Hoover up public service contracts and market share?

We see many of these ideas feeding into the Localism Act, passed in 2011. This Act reflects the latest reformulation of political ideas of the relationship between the State and welfare. These include six stages or ‘actions’ of decentralisation which, in theory shift society from the Big Government to the Big Society.

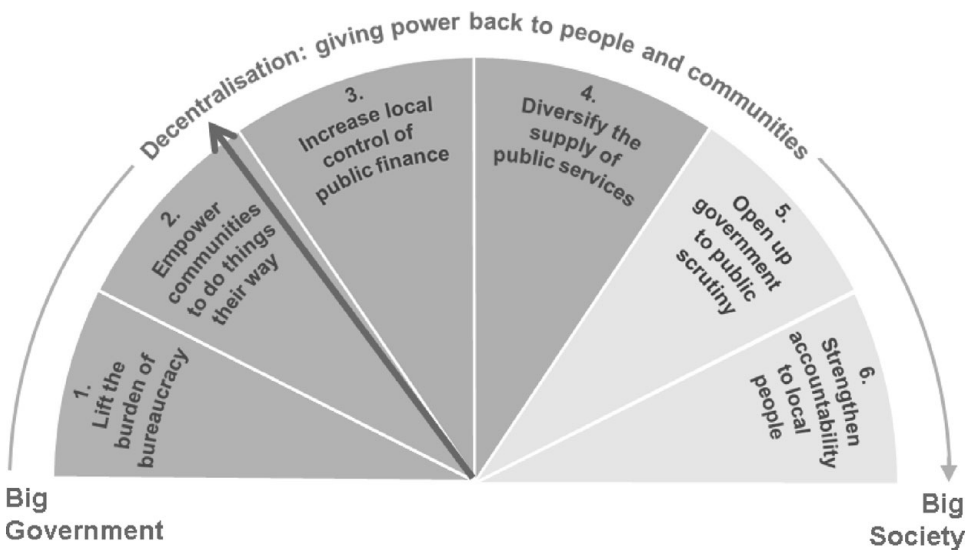


Figure 1. From Big Government to Big Society
Source: HM Government, 2010: 3.

We can speculate that the current trajectory of welfare reform in the UK is pushing further in the direction of localism and social enterprise, but now with a strong dose of virtue ethics added for good measure.

What is the role of religion in the UK's post-universal welfare state?

The government/social policy view

The way institutional religion has been viewed by the world of social policy has also shifted in the last ten to fifteen years, in line with the third phase identified by Stoker. Religion has moved in public policy terms from being the Cinderella of the community and voluntary sector to being highly favoured, with millions of pounds of government money being pumped into helping faith groups become 'service provider' ready.¹

Extensive material has emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century on the pros and cons of re-engaging religion in public life (for example, Inter Faith Network, 1999; Lewis, 2001; Greater London Enterprise/London Churches Group, 2002; Farnell *et al.*, 2003; Northwest Development Agency, 2003, 2005, 2009; Lukka *et al.*, 2003; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008; Devine, 2012). However, there are common threads in all these accounts which illuminate the current position:

- the complexity of providing social care and welfare to an increasingly diverse and plural British society has alerted policy planners to the embedded and (sometimes) culturally appropriate way religious communities and traditions provide for the needs of their wider ethnic or cultural group;
- high profile rioting in several northern British cities along ethnic and religious lines at the start of the twenty-first century, plus the growing awareness of religion-based terrorism in the UK and abroad, has problematised and sensitised the issue of religion in the eyes of many, and so polarised debate about the social benefits of religion;
- for those who see religion as the solution to the problems encountered by marginalised groups and the lack of social cohesion, religious groups are generally seen as natural repositories of volunteers and both formal and informal forms of social care; in short bountiful providers of what has been called social capital;
- religious groups are perceived to be carriers of moral and communitarian ethics and values at a time when social and economic pressures appear to be driving people and communities further apart (Baker, 2011).

A useful summary of the official 'public policy' approach to religion has been provided by Lowndes and Chapman (2005) who outline a threefold rationale with regard to why the State chooses to engage faith groups in social welfare and civil regeneration. First is the 'leadership' rationale (i.e. the local leadership and leadership training that faith groups provide for their communities). The second, the 'resources' rationale, refers to the resources that faith groups provide in respect to social welfare and civil renewal (namely leadership, volunteering, buildings, access to hard to reach groups). Perhaps most interesting is the third rationale, which they refer to as 'normative'; i.e., the norms and values that faith groups bring to the welfare agenda and which will be 'motivated by their theology'. Lowndes and Chapman's description of this aspect of religious contribution proceeds thus:

The distinctiveness of these motivations lies in the holistic nature of faith-based value systems and the embeddedness of faith groups within communities. Harnessing and supporting faith-based motivations for engagement can contribute to civil renewal objectives while also expressing the more specific goal of re-moralising public life – asserting the importance of debating and celebrating the values that underpin British Society. (2005: 27)

The idea that the State might ‘harness and support faith-based motivations’ as a specific welfare and social policy strategy ‘to contribute to civil renewal objectives’ and ‘remoralise public life’ is an interesting example of how far public policy has shifted in favour of a post-secular position. These recommendations are coming from two social scientists – not religious leaders or insiders. ‘Secular’ social policy is inviting faith groups to not only provide practical resources to the social welfare of the nation, but also to remind society of key values, ethical norms and principles that should lie at its core. Their views are not representative of other positions within social policy which would tend towards a more sceptical position (e.g. Farnell *et al.*, 2003).

The view from the religious side

Having seen the different ways in which the State perceives the view of the role of faith groups in social welfare, it is possible to now offer three typologies of engagement between religion and social welfare, some of which have emerged as theoretical constructs from several years of qualitative research undertaken by the William Temple Foundation into the practices and discourses of religious groups engaged in wider civil society.² These interconnecting typologies are: economies of grace, religious and spiritual capital, spaces of rapprochement between religious and secular social actors.

Economies of grace (and their three modalities)

This first category, with its explicit references to grace, may make non-religious and differently religious commentators and practitioners feel somewhat uncomfortable. However, to deny the motivating reality of this concept for faith-based social actors would be disingenuous. It is constructed from a number of components that come together in a powerful synthesis of intense private belief and public practice.

The concept of grace (as the personal and ‘real’ experience of love, peace and wellbeing, including forgiveness and release) is derived from a source that is perceived in terms of God, Divine, Spirit. It is beyond the comprehension and control of the individual to manipulate or understand, and lies at the heart of all the narratives of engagement related in the Foundation’s research projects. The expression and experience of this grace is, naturally, culturally conditioned. But the core narrative lying at the heart of much religious and spiritual life is this experience of having one’s life touched (or even gripped) by a sense of love and security which then often compels one (either out of a sense of love or duty – or both) to reach out to others who are both within but also beyond the confines of one’s own religious group. This is so that others may also have the chance to experience and participate in that same sense of love, peace and security.

Second, there is the notion of economy, which here is taken in a deliberately broad and non-technical way. The word economy is derived from the Greek word *oikonomia* meaning management of the household. The root (literally) therefore of all economic

activity is in creating an ordered and stable environment in which the members of one's family and other parts of society can flourish. Religious engagements that help create economies of human flourishing often spring from what William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, one of the architects of the British Welfare State, called 'the ordinary interaction of ordinary people' (Temple, 1942: 18). This has been called the 'being there' modality, and is the first of three 'modalities' of religiously based social care. The other two are the 'mainstream' modality and the 'alternative' modality (Baker, 2011).

The 'being there' modality has the following features. It refers to those mundane spaces of engagement and support that religious groups offer to their local community as a seamless part of their everyday sense of mission and purpose: the drop-in coffee mornings, the lunch clubs, the bring and buy stalls or the charity shop-style clothes swaps, the food boxes for asylum refugees, the discussion groups, etc. For example, a report produced by the Institute for Volunteering Research in 2003 highlighted the range of services and routine activities centred on the rituals or practices of sharing food, prayer and major religious festivals. These activities involved few paid staff, but the involvement of many unpaid volunteers on an informal and spontaneous basis. Many of these activities relate to the members of the religious groups themselves, and many faith communities are not in official funding loops. They contribute in ways that are organic, based on habit and personal contact – and which are distinctly low tech. The sort of social capital generated by most faith groups in this way is of a *bonding* type (i.e. building up the resilience of the local group) (Putnam, 2000: 25).

Second, is the 'mainstream modality', whereby religious groups formally accept that they will partake in state initiatives or partnership schemes; they will bid for government contracts, or apply for government training funds in order to fulfil government-led targets and initiatives. They will take the trouble to learn the language of accountability, business plans and corporate governance, and to some extent allow the terms and conditions of partnership or contractual opportunity to shape their own internal structures. They are more likely to employ and manage professional workers. They might establish arms-length companies to implicitly convey their religious ethos while freeing themselves to apply for funding they might not be able to justify otherwise (like Lottery Funding) (Baker and Skinner, 2006). This is social care and intervention based at an institutional and professional level. It is consciously an attempt to create more *bridging* rather than bonding forms of social capital (Putnam, 2000: 25), a strategy that forms bridges and connections beyond the confines of your membership. One question raised by the mainstream modality is whether or not being accountable to an external funder is less likely to lead to practices that question or critique the status quo.

The fullest expression of the religious imagination within social, political and economic systems is most likely to occur at the 'alternative' modality of the engagement spectrum, where religious involvement is consciously pitched to either develop new technological practices of engagement or actively participates in counter-hegemonic practices or discourses. For example, in Manchester in the early 2000s, two Christian movements coming from disparate theological positions – one from a quasi-Marxist liberation theology position, the other from an evangelical charismatic position – established different pioneering community development projects. The former established an empowerment network for communities losing their housing under regeneration initiatives in East Manchester, and was one of the first agencies to establish community budgeting in the city. The latter, via its youth mentoring schemes (which also involve

the use of residential communities of youth workers living in very marginalised neighbourhoods), established training programmes for microbusinesses and social entrepreneurs amongst fifteen- to nineteen-year olds so that they would be encouraged to stay in their local communities, and not seek work elsewhere. This fluid way of working demonstrated by both case studies, which crosses institutional boundaries and mixes both network and institutional organisational flows, has been called a hybrid form of religious engagement or church (Baker, 2009). This methodology is more likely to tap into both volunteer and professionally based knowledge, but puts the stakeholder much more to the fore of the planning and delivery of the services required. It is flexible, responsive and highly entrepreneurial as well as technically skilled. In terms of social capital theory, its desire to challenge some of the hegemonic forms of political economy, that trap people in cycles of poverty and inequality, means that it is the closest one can get to *linking* social capital – i.e., brings to bear the resources of knowledge and funding and education to those at the bottom of society so that their capital assets can be enhanced to bring about deep and more permanent change (Halpern, 2005: 25).

However, none of these typologies does justice to the complexity of the situation on the ground. All types of religious-based engagement have the potential to be deeply and symbolically counter-cultural; to be socially progressive or socially regressive. What can be argued as indisputable is the notion that, implicitly or explicitly, religious-based engagement usually reflects an economy of grace, because its roots lie in notions of transformation. At their most ordinary, these notions of transformation relate to the level of the individual. At their most ambitious, they suggest the need and desire for deep structural change. In other words, there is an expectation that both personal *and* corporate structures will be changed by the interface of ‘divine’ grace with human experience and institutions.

Religious and spiritual capital

The prevalence of the social capital debate has already been noted within the previous section, where different types of social capital were alluded to: bonding, bridging and linking. The concept of social capital lay at the heart of New Labour’s (1997–2010) analysis of social breakdown in British society and the tools required to restore a sense of community cohesion and trust.

Within this significant framework for social welfare, the William Temple Foundation (WTF) has made its own contribution in the UK in developing ideas of religious and spiritual capital based on its empirical research. These ‘capitals’ emerged from a close listening and engagement with not only the practical contributions that churches and other religious organisations make to local, regional and national life, but also from the motivations of these faith groups as to *why* they are able to engage so consistently and persistently in the common life. This ‘why’ of things was the ‘faith’ behind their engagement in public life; the theological worldviews and the moral frameworks that were also shaped by the practices of private and collective prayer and worship.

The Foundation wanted to stress these faithful motivations and worldviews, because in the UK’s largely secularised discussion and policy frameworks, the place of religious belief is either misunderstood by secular partners, or, worse, seen as a threat to the balance of public life, and needs to be suppressed or by-passed. Thus, within this analysis, we make the distinction but also emphasise the close links between religious and spiritual capital. Religious capital we call ‘the practical contribution to local and national life by

faith groups' (Baker and Skinner, 2006: 9), which has been well documented in the last ten years or so and is seen as largely uncontroversial. Spiritual capital on the other hand is the motivating or energising force behind religious capital. We suggest that 'it energises religious capital by providing a theological identity and worshipping tradition, but also a value system, moral vision and a basis of faith' (Baker and Skinner, 2006). We go on to suggest that spiritual capital gives the contributions of religious groups their distinctive edge – an edge that not always sits comfortably within the mainstream public policy and social welfare discourse. This discomfort is evident at a number of levels: often a suspicion that religious groups will use their religious capital (i.e. their engagement in public life) as a means of converting or proselytising clients; discomfort at the intensity of the vocabulary used when faith groups want to talk about not only what they do, but why they do what they do; a related suspicion that faith-based discourse is not rational or neutral, but rather impassioned and rhetorical – indeed verging on the irrational.

What then does this spiritual capital look like? In WTF's research for the Church Urban Fund (2002–5), we attempted to understand the attitudes of churches involved in highly marginalised communities undergoing rapid urban regeneration in Manchester, and asked them what vision they had for 'regeneration'. The following list is a distillation of many church-based views, derived from a wide variety of denominational and theological perspectives. As an expression of spiritual capital (i.e. the moral drive and theological vision that underpins their involvement), it has the following components:

- a focus on transforming people personally and spiritually, as well as improving their area physically;
- a strong value is placed on personal stories, especially about how individual 'regeneration' occurs;
- a belief implicitly or explicitly that God is at work within areas of regeneration and civil society;
- an acceptance that there is considerable and strong emotion experienced and expressed when working for healthy communities (for example, anger, frustration, cynicism, weariness, fragility) and an acknowledgement of the importance and significance of 'feelings';
- an introduction to the values of self-emptying, forgiveness, transformation, risk-taking and openness to learning;
- an intention to accept those who have been rejected elsewhere;
- an acceptance of people's inner resources and their capacity to create their own solutions to their problems, ones that constitute a form of *liquid* capital relating to intangibles such as ideas and visions, not exclusively claimed by a specific religious tradition (Baker and Skinner, 2006: 11).

This of course is the spiritual capital that emerges from within a specifically Christian form of engagement. If one conducted the same attitude survey with Sikh, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist or New Age groups, one would come up with a different list, although many of the principles and aspirations expressed would be remarkably consistent across the board (as our recent Leverhulme research showed). Again it is perhaps symptomatic of the post-secular shift that has occurred in the UK, that, regardless of whether or not you personally feel comfortable with this type of discourse, it has nevertheless become increasingly acceptable in the public domain, and not just within the religious part of civil society. Recent expressions of secular spiritual capital can also be found in the arenas

of social care, health care and planning (see Sandercock, 2008, Sandercock and Senbel, 2011; Baker and Miles-Watson, 2008 for examples of secular spiritual capital).

There is, of course, the potential for a despotic and damaging role of religion in the lives of both individuals and communities. Similarly, there are limitations of social capital theory, and therefore the attendant critiques that are levelled at the ideas of religious and spiritual capital: that the concept is too imprecise, that it is too instrumental and normative (i.e., assumes what is there or ought to be there) and therefore lacks a critical analysis of the structural basis of power in society. Others meanwhile, object to the language of the market (i.e. capital) being brought into areas of life that should be free of that sort of pressure and influence, pointing to this use as further proof of the insidious 'marketisation' of civic life. All these objections are valid, but as yet no-one has found a viable alternative concept that allows so many different disciplines to engage in research and debate where at least there is some understanding of basic terms. So despite being a less than perfect tool of analysis and description, no suitable alternative has yet been found in this increasingly slippery and blurred – yet surprisingly responsive – public space.

Spaces of rapprochement between religious and secular 'social actors' – the post-secular turn?

The final heading emerges from the renewed interest in religious spaces from within critical human and urban geographies. In the past ten years, human geographers have become keenly aware of the spatial and cultural impact that religion is having on urban space, as it fills the vacuum left by the collapse of modernist ideologies, such as communism and colonialism. Religion and spirituality is thriving in the post-soviet, post-colonial city, and far from being at odds with urbanisation (as Cox surmised in his book *The Secular City* (1965)), religion is proving itself not only resilient, but also remarkably adaptable to rapidly changing urban spaces. Indeed, it is suggested that religion mimics in its patterns of evangelisation, the spatial forms and virtual processes of dissemination and consumerism so redolent of the post-modern global city (see Goh, 2011). Within this symbiotic interaction between contemporary religion and contemporary urbanisation is the idea that as new urban spaces are created and formed in rapid succession, so new social practices also emerge to take advantage of these new fluidities and opportunities.

Some of these new spaces can be analysed in relation to urban social welfare, with the suggestion that informal as well as formal spaces of engagement or *rapprochement* are being created between religious and non-religious social actors. A main focus of *rapprochement* has traditionally been work with homeless people living on the streets. One commentator describes this coming together in the following way:

This willingness to work together *with* different people *for* different people was a key characteristic of the service landscape. Faith groups welcomed co-workers with no religious persuasion, and vice versa, in a *rapprochement* of ethical praxis forged out of the necessity to provide a response to the needs of homeless people in the city. (Cloke, 2011: 238)

Other areas of *rapprochement* variously noted by commentators include Fairtrade campaigning and broad-based organising (Bretherton, 2010; Atherton, 2009). As yet, there is not enough research to substantiate the origins and purposes of these new arenas of post-secular *rapprochement*. But they raise certain intriguing possibilities as to the emergence of a post-secular welfare space.

Some of this rapprochement is generated by government policy, which, as we have pointed out, is both economically and ideologically wedded to rolling back the barriers of the State and encouraging more of a self-help ethos. The drive towards partnership is now a political as well as moral mandate. Similarly, interfaith activities and gatherings of the great and the good are significant and symbolically important. Yet is this what we entirely mean by rapprochement? What we may be witnessing here is a form of what the author has referred to elsewhere as a 'passionate pragmatism' (Baker, 2011), by which social actors on all sides are willing to experiment in a new 'politics of becoming'. This new politics of becoming is linked to other key theories and practices that have emerged in the early part of this millennium and that speak of an organic and multi-leveled evolution in new forms of democratic formation and community organisation: liquid civil society (Baker, 2009); self-organising rather than centrally planned futures; open ended processes ('I can't tell you what the future will look like, but I know when it works'); and the discovery of the empowered but politically (in the party political sense) disengaged citizen (Johar and Bundeman, 2011).

This article proposes that what these terms suggest (and the discourse is mushrooming as quickly as the praxis) is a willingness to find a common way of translating key ideas of peace, justice and hospitality into everyday practice; what Paul Cloke, Professor of Human Geography at Exeter University calls 'cross-over narratives' (Cloke, 2011: 241). In these various ways, social actors are beginning to break down the rigid boundaries between public secularism and private faith. The meeting ground between different social actors engaged in welfare provision is more likely to be ethical rather than moral, but it is interesting to speculate how issues of ethics are finding their way to prominence within the shifting political fabric of our cities.

Conclusion - reconfiguring the relationship between religion and social welfare in the UK

This article has outlined the recent trajectory of social welfare reform in the UK and characterised it as the continuing dismantling of a universal and comprehensive model of welfare in favour of the following norm: namely the idea that there *is* such a thing as society provided you (the citizen) have the means and time to create it for yourself and provided you are increasingly willing to fund key elements of social care from your own resources. This is not a simple monetarist equation, since there is now a strong moral rhetoric that attempts to justify or endorse an associative model of social care by talking in terms of responsibility: responsibility to the common good reflected in the appeal to 'ethos' in the form of virtue, subsidiarity and sympathy. The transition from Esping-Andersen's (1990, 1999) social democratic model of welfare is as clear and pronounced as ever. However, the transition towards *what* in terms of future models of social care provision remains highly unclear and therefore potentially problematic.

However, in terms of the relationship between religion and social welfare, these dynamics reflect good news for religion. It has come back in from nearly sixty years out in the cold, when the techno-material universal welfare state squeezed out most of its relevance or credibility. The essentially conservative (with a small 'c') narratives of mutual and localised self-help now dominating the social welfare agenda, and the moral virtues required to make this work, have a comforting Neo-Tocquevillian ring which chimes well with the essential moral and political conservatism of most faith groups.

Some faith groups have proved highly adept at developing new technologies of social care and welfare, whilst rooting them in a good old-fashioned gospel of unconditional love and forgiveness and the positive power of transformation at the individual as well as the social level. In other words, it is a kind of 'return to the future contribution', and the present highly diverse and confused systems of social care will allow and, in many places, positively welcome the added value that religious-based welfare, with its combination of religious and spiritual capital, brings to the social capital mix.

Religious-based social welfare will continue to mutate and adapt to whatever the prevailing conditions of the political economy are. It is to be hoped, however, that it maintains its critical edge – that as well as 'being there', and working in partnership as part of 'the mainstream', it continues to draw on the deep wells of its ethical and symbolic traditions to propose and develop 'alternative' visions, technologies and practices. Ultimately, human beings were not designed to consume different choices of social welfare, but to stand in solidarity with others, especially those most marginalised and excluded.

Notes

1 For example, the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund which disbursed £12 million to faith-based organisations in 2006–7 on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

2 The following section is an expanded version of my chapter entitled 'Faiths and the social and welfare policy' in a book co-written with John Atherton and John Reader entitled *Christianity and the New Social Order: A Manifesto for a Fairer Society* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), 2011). The Foundation's research referred to includes: 'Regenerating communities: a theological and strategic critique' (2002–5) on behalf of the Church Urban Fund which looked at the experience of eight churches engaged in the urban regenerating policies of the New Labour government; and 'Faith and traditional capitals: redefining the public scope of religious capital' (2007–10) on behalf of the Leverhulme Trust exploring ideas of religious and spiritual capital, and conducted across a wide variety of religious and spiritual traditions in the UK.

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