

Faith and Volunteering in the UK: Towards a Virtuous Cycle for the Accumulation of Social, Religious and Spiritual Capital?

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In the context of a communitarian discourse under the New Labour government (1997-2010), the theoretical concept of social capital as developed by Putnam¹ was influential on policy in welfare and community development. Faith communities, particularly those in ethnically and religiously diverse urban areas, were recognised as banks of social capital which could, as it were, be invested for the public good in areas such as urban regeneration, social welfare and – especially after September 2001 – in community cohesion and national security. Since 2010, under the coalition government headed by David Cameron, the notion of ‘the Big Society’ has been central in policy discourse. Under both governments, voluntary groups, including faith-based congregations and charities, have been urged to play a more significant role in community work and social welfare, and the ‘volunteer’ is portrayed as the archetypal good citizen. Debates continue as to whether this offers a genuine space for religion to make a contribution in the public sphere and/or whether it is the state seeking to control and exploit the voluntary and faith sectors, in part as a cynical cost-cutting exercise.²

In developing the debate on the relationship between faith and social capital, Baker and colleagues at the William Temple Foundation, drawing on Bourdieu’s³ work on different forms of capital, have introduced the notions of ‘religious capital’ and ‘spiritual capital’. In this article it is argued that when considering volunteering in such a theoretical framework, it is essential to examine the relationship of labour to the different forms of capital. One must recognise that volunteers, in supplying unpaid labour to churches and other religious or not-for-profit organisations, are among other things involved in an economic transaction. To what degree is the Marxist view that the accumulation of capital depends on the exploitation of labour relevant in this context?

This article considers some of the empirical evidence from recent UK surveys and reports which cover faith and volunteering and which highlight their limitations in exploring the relationships between the different forms of capital. It then draws on qualitative reflections

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- 1 Putnam, R.D. (1995), ‘Tuning in, tuning out: The strange disappearance of social capital in America’, *Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 28 No 4, 664–683, S. 1049–0965; Putnam, R. (2000), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York.
 - 2 Williams, R. (2010). ‘How should churches respond to the Big Society’, Text of speech at the second of the Charities Parliament Big Society seminars, July 2010.
<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2956> (accessed 19/11/10);
Ekklesia (2010), ‘Common Wealth: Christians for economic and social justice’,
<http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/CommonWealthStatement> (accessed 19/11/10)
 - 3 Bourdieu, P. (1986), ‘The Forms of Capital’, in J.G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York, 241–258

on the author's recent role as manager of a community centre attached to a Christian church building in a city in the north of England. In delivering a 'diaconal' programme of social care and community service activities reaching homeless and elderly people, the centre relied heavily on volunteers from the local community beyond the committed faithful members of the local church. Volunteers ranged from those whose motivations were religious or largely altruistic to those with instrumental motives and those whose unpaid labour was to some extent coerced by statutory agencies. Not only does this stretch the definition of the term 'volunteering', but it also raises some ethical and theological issues for a church espousing Christian values of justice, truth and human dignity while seeking to operate in the secular space of the public sphere.

Keywords: volunteering, social capital, religion, welfare

Introduction

The starting point for this article is the theory of social and various other forms of capital that have informed public policy in the UK over the last fifteen years, and their application to the contribution of churches and other faith communities in the public sphere. While there are a growing number of references in the literature to religious, spiritual and even faithful capital, they generally seem to be treated as commodities, and there appears as yet to be scant consideration of the work required to produce them. This gap is the main focus of my article, and I will attempt to extend the theory to consider the relationship of labour, and especially the unpaid labour of volunteers, to the accumulation of different forms of capital.

Volunteering can be defined most simply following Davis Smith⁴ as "any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment." However, a forty-page working paper published by the Institute of Volunteering Research⁵ suggests that a multidimensional framework is necessary in order to account for the complexity of practices and understandings among voluntary organisations, volunteers, the public, and policymakers. This complexity will be reflected in the treatment of the notion in this article.

Nonetheless, volunteering has often been highlighted as a distinctive contribution by people of faith to the public good, and the second section will look at some of the empirical evidence from recent surveys and reports covering religion and civil society. In local religious contexts the picture is often more complex and con-

4 Davis Smith, J. (1998), *The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering*, National Centre for Volunteering, London.

5 Ellis Paine, A./Hill, M./Rochester, C. (2010), 'A Rose by any other Name...' Revisiting the Question: 'What exactly is Volunteering?', Working Series: Paper One, Institute for Volunteering Research <http://www.ivr.org.uk/projects/Current+Projects/Working+Papers> (accessed 24/5/2011)

fusing, as the case study material in section three illustrates. The discussion moves on in sections four and five to consider the economics of a faith-based welfare enterprise and the ethical and theological issues that may arise. In conclusion, the relationship between different forms of capital and the modes of production of each of them are considered, leading to a suggestion that a virtuous cycle of faith and diaconal action in society is indeed possible.

1. Theoretical Framework: Social and Other Forms of Capital

It has become commonplace in recent policy debates about volunteering, citizenship and civil society to use the discourse of social capital, usually following the framework suggested by Putnam⁶ and arguing that voluntary action within civil society increases the stock of social capital and is to be regarded as a public good. There are of course some critical and dissenting voices in the debates who introduce modified or complementary concepts and theories⁷ while others dismiss the concept as meaningless.⁸ Putnam understands social capital from a functionalist perspective; he defines and attempts to measure it largely as a property of communities and whole societies, and has refined the concept by distinguishing bonding (intra-community), bridging (cross-community) and linking (socially vertical) forms. In contrast, Bourdieu sees social capital as abstract property acquired by individuals, groups, or networks of individuals, which can be used to competitive advantage in securing economic resources, status and power. Bourdieu also posits other forms of capital, such as cultural, human, and religious capital. As the present author has argued elsewhere,⁹ although social capital is poorly defined and intrinsically impossible to measure, the concept does have value as a useful metaphor or sensitising concept for the social scientist, and has a resonance with popular debates about contemporary communities. However, in the context of the dominance of global market economics and the increasing marketisation of welfare services in the UK and elsewhere, it does seem significant, if not a little disturbing, that relationships in the community, based on Putnam's trinity of "trust, networks and norms" and the Christian virtues of altruism, mutuality and solidarity with the

6 Putnam: 1995; 2000

7 Bourdieu: 1986; Portes, A. (1998), Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24: 1–24

8 Fine, B. (2010), *Theories of Social Capital: Researchers Behaving Badly*, London

9 Smith, G. (2001), 'Religion as a source of social capital in the regeneration and globalisation of East London', (2001) *Rising East*, (Vo. 4. No.3 Spring 2001), London; Smith, G. (2002), 'Religion and the rise of social capitalism: The faith communities in community development and urban regeneration in England', *Community Development Journal* 37(2): 167–177

marginalised, have been reified, even commodified, using the language and metaphor of 'capital'.

In recent work at the William Temple Foundation (WTF) the author, with Chris Baker and other colleagues, have been widening the debate by developing theories of religious and spiritual capital.¹⁰ These forms of capital are seen as distinct but complementary dimensions to the well-established concept of social capital (in its various bonding, bridging and linking modes). In particular it proposes that *spiritual capital* in individuals comprises a theological or spiritual worldview, set of values and vision for the future expressed in and mediated by activities such as prayer and worship, which motivate them to make a practical and generous contribution to society. Such generosity is often located and mediated in a context of significant *religious capital*, a term we use to describe the practical contribution that faith groups (as institutions) make to society through the use of buildings, volunteers, paid community workers, faith-based social networks, and activities for particular age or interest groups.¹¹

What seems to be rarely discussed, however, is the concept of the labour or work that goes into the formation of social (or other forms of) capital. A Google search on the term 'social labour' is not very revealing. There are some uses of the term by Marx and his followers but largely in the sense of co-operation in organised work. There is also a suggestion in the Wikipedia article on Bourdieu¹² that he used the term with reference to the efforts parents make in securing the education which enhances the cultural capital and, eventually, the economic capital of their offspring.

The relationship between social and economic capital (and the associated forms of labour and production) also seems problematic and relatively unexplored. There has been some discussion in the literature of the value of social capital and human capital (i.e. education and skills) to individuals in the labour market, and of collective social capital to the overall economy through research which seeks to put an economic value on volunteering to the economy as a whole.¹³

10 Baker, C./Skinner, H. (2006), *Faith in Action: The dynamic connection between religious and spiritual capital* Manchester: William Temple Foundation, <http://www.wtf.org.uk/documents/faith-in-action.pdf> (accessed 24/5/11); Baker, C./Smith, G. (2011), 'Spiritual, religious and social capital – exploring their dimensions and their relationship with faith-based motivation and participation in UK civil society', Summary working paper Manchester: William Temple Foundation (Based on a paper presented at the BSA Sociology of Religion Group Conference, Edinburgh April 2010) <http://www.wtf.org.uk/activities/documents/-BAKERANDSMITH270810.pdf> (accessed 25/5/11)

11 This is somewhat different from Bourdieu's definition of religious capital which revolves around the power and influence a person may acquire through holding and mobilising specific forms of religious knowledge, skill or privilege that is valued by a society.

12 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Bourdieu

13 Gaskin, K./Dobson, B. (1996), *The Economic Equation of Volunteering: A pilot study*, Centre for Research in Social Policy, London; NWDA (February 2005), *Faith In England's Northwest: Economic Impact Assessment* Warrington, North West Development Agency;

What can we say about unpaid religious and spiritual labour? Many people of faith regularly offer many hours of voluntary service, work for which they are not financially reimbursed by the programmes of their church or faith community. This can range from leading in worship or teaching children to making tea or unblocking the church drains. Without such religious labour most congregations would rapidly cease to operate or become bankrupt if they paid for the work. There is also spiritual labour, which could be defined as the hours spent individually or corporately in worship, prayer or spiritual disciplines, designed to strengthen or deepen relationships with God. Most people of faith place much higher value on religious – and especially spiritual – capital than on economic or social capital, and consider such activity to be priceless and impossible to measure in financial terms. For many, the reduction to monetary terms of the value of a relationship with the Divine or of community participation and friendly, caring relationships within or through their congregation is quite simply abhorrent. Christians often cite the words of Jesus in Mark 8:36: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”¹⁴

If, however, we move from a concept of volunteering towards one of ‘unpaid labour’, we may begin to see things in a radically different way. Clearly the work carried out by faith-based or secular not-for-profit organisations contributes to social capital, to the common good, to human well-being and even to economic prosperity. But to the extent that such a contribution depends on unpaid (or low-paid) labour, it can be seen as exploitation of the value of that labour into forms of capital which tend to become concentrated under the control of large social capitalists (individual social entrepreneurs or corporate third-sector organisations, including church denominations and/or the state)? When talking with people living on the margins of society, one frequently hears sceptical or cynical comments about large institutions and ‘empire builders’. This accumulation of capital built in part at least on the exploitation of unpaid labour may even be reflected in the inflated salaries offered to some of the senior managers and professionals in the sector.

The problem becomes even more obvious in cases where there is any degree of persuasion or coercion applied to people who take up unpaid labour as ‘volunteers’. Many volunteers may give their time out of relatively pure generosity or altruism, or at least because they derive satisfaction from doing something worthwhile or from the social interaction they enjoy. However, increasing numbers of students and new graduates are advised that a spell of volunteering is good for their CV and employment prospects, and workless people are pressured to undertake voluntary work as a step towards paid employment. In such settings the exploitation of social labour to produce social (and economic) capital for others becomes more evident.

http://www.faithnorthwest.org.uk/assets/_files/documents/feb_10/faith__1266928379_Faith_in_Englands_Northwest_Ec.pdf (accessed 19/11/10)

14 King James Version.

Moreover, it is almost certainly the case that religious people, and faith communities whose divinely sanctioned values and community norms shared in close social networks such as a local congregation usually promote generosity and charitable action, are particularly vulnerable to such exploitation.

Adopting this Marxist-type analysis is not to deny that even unwilling volunteers can receive some personal benefits in terms of extending their personal human and social capital from undertaking unpaid work. Nor does it contradict the fact that needy beneficiaries or good causes may be helped substantially in ways that they might not if left to the market or the state. However, it does highlight the danger that policy might move in the direction of making unpaid labour for the community compulsory and thus rendering the concept of voluntary work ridiculous.

2. Research on Faith and Volunteering in the UK

In the first decade of the new millennium it is clear that the significance of religion for government policy has increased, largely as a reflection of the emergence of Islam in its various forms in global politics. In the UK there have been important debates about the role of religion in the public sphere and a significant growth in social research where religion is an important variable. The 'faith communities' (a recent neologism) are regularly referred to and consulted by national and local government, and are seen as potential partners in delivering policy goals in urban regeneration¹⁵ and social welfare. They are recognised as an important strand of civil society within 'the third sector' which is sometimes now referred to as the VCFS (Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector). Research on volunteering in the context of faith has included qualitative studies such as Locke, Lukka, and Soteri-Proctor¹⁶ and reports on surveys.¹⁷

Outside the academic literature one hears many assertions that faith brings added value to voluntary efforts in terms of going the extra mile and long-term commitment to communities and causes. For example, according to Faithworks,

15 Farnell, R./Furbey, R. A./Hills, S. S. A./Macey, M./Smith, G. (2003), *Faith in urban regeneration? Engaging faith communities in urban regeneration*, Bristol.

16 Locke, M./Lukka, P./Soteri-Proctor, A. (2003), 'Faith and voluntary action: Community, values and resources', Institute for Volunteering Research.

17 NCVO (2007), *Faith and voluntary action: An overview of current evidence and debates*, London: NCVO.

The church, with its history of public service, valuable local knowledge and motivated voluntary workforce in every village, town and city is best placed to fill the ever growing gaps in service provision. Put bluntly, you get far more bang for your buck from the Church.¹⁸

However, it is fairly difficult to gather convincing measurable evidence to back this up. One attempt to provide it is a recent survey of over 17,000 (mostly) evangelical Christians which suggests as many as 99% of evangelical Christians do some type of volunteering each year, 81% do some kind of voluntary work each month, and 43% volunteer for their church in an activity that serves the local community at least once a fortnight.¹⁹ However, while this particular survey appears reasonably robust, it was carried out using a sample drawn entirely from the Christian community. Because this type of research and most of the assertions originate from religious bodies who may wish to prove a point, they may well be treated with some scepticism by non-believers.

Academic UK-based studies of motivation of volunteers in faith-based settings are hard to locate in comparison with other countries, for example Borgonovi's²⁰ quantitative studies from the USA, or Yeung's (later under the name Pessi)²¹ corpus of work from Scandinavia. There are however some large government surveys that may cast some light on these issues. Back in 2006 at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' research conference, in an attempt to look at some British evidence and test the validity of the hypothesis that faith adds value to voluntary action, I presented a paper based on some secondary analyses of data on volunteering from the Home Office Citizenship Surveys of 2001 and 2003, the BHPS 9th wave, and the 1994 PSI survey of ethnic minorities.²² I posed questions about whether it was possible to discern if people with a religious faith were more or less likely to volunteer, i.e. offer unpaid labour in formal organisations or informal settings, than people who said they had little or no religious faith.

18 Faithworks (2010), Will party leaders acknowledge the millions that the Christian voluntary sector saves the state each year? (press release 23/04/2010) at <http://www.faithworks.info/Standard.asp?id=9152> (accessed 19/1/10)

19 Evangelical Alliance (2011), '21st Century Evangelicals: A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK', London, Evangelical Alliance, <http://www.eauk.org/snapshot/>

20 c.f. Borgonovi, F. (2008a), *Divided We Stand, United We Fall: Religious Pluralism, Giving, and Volunteering* American Sociological Review; Feb 2008; 73, 1; 105; Borgonovi, F. (2008b), *Doing well by doing good. The relationship between formal volunteering and self-reported health and happiness*; *Social Science & Medicine* 66 (2008) 2321–2334

21 Yeung A. B. (2003), 'Civil Society, Social Capital and Volunteering in Finland. Contemporary Trends in Finnish Volunteering', *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 3/2003, 63–80; Yeung, A.B. (2001), 'Manifold motives for volunteerism. A study on the motives of the people inspired to volunteer by a Salvation Army advertisement', *Journal für Psychologie*, 3/2001, 37–47; Pessi, A.B. (2008), 'Why volunteer? Nordic Journal of Religion and Society', 1/2001, 53–60; Pessi, A.B. (2008), 'Free to Choose – so why choose volunteering?' *Voluntary Action* 1(9), 2008, 36–45

22 Smith, G. (2006), 'Faith, Volunteering and Social Capital: What the Surveys Say', Paper presented at NCVO Research Conference, University of Warwick.

The question is of course a complex one, as it depends on how one defines and sets about measuring every item in a complex equation. Furthermore, when working on secondary analyses of large survey data sets, one is at the mercy of the original researchers in terms of the questions they have chosen to ask, or not ask, and the terminology and categories they have used in the questionnaire. Much government and academic research, while methodologically robust and claiming to be objective, rarely understands the religious context sufficiently well to ask the in-depth questions that would throw light on such claims or hypotheses. Indeed, very few surveys in the UK with relevance to volunteering use more than two questions about faith – the first on religious affiliation and the second attempting to assess strength of commitment – in terms of regular participation in worship, a binary split between those who say they are practising or non-practising, or a self-assessment of the importance of faith or religious identity. In a multi-ethnic multi-faith setting, the cultural meanings and norms attached to concepts of religion, faith commitment, belief and ritual, as well as those attached to charity and voluntary services, are extremely diverse and impossible to reduce to standardised survey questions and variables.

In addition, analysis requires multivariate techniques because in large data sets relations between the variable of ‘faith’ and the variable of ‘volunteering’ will be complicated by the effects of other demographic variables such as age, gender, class, education, ethnicity, employment pattern, and locality of residence. Furthermore, regression models struggle with the problem of co-linearity because the distribution of these demographic variables varies and is mutually correlated across the faith communities; for example, Muslims are more likely to be young, urban, male, South Asian and unemployed than the majority of active Christians.

A superficial analysis (as presented in the main reports of the surveys and summarised in NCVO 2007) suggests that respondents who are Jewish, Christian, Buddhist or of no religion are more likely than average to be involved in formal volunteering, while Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims are less likely than average to be involved in this way.

However, after some complex logistical regression analysis, my key conclusions were:

- Religious affiliation as such appears to have no significant effect on volunteering rates when class-related variables, ethnicity, age, gender, and variables relating to integration into the local neighbourhood are taken into account.
- However, those who report their religious identity as important or who have been recent or regular attendees at worship are significantly more likely to report formal volunteering in a group context. This effect is particularly noticeable among Christians.

More recent data from the 2007 citizenship survey²³ seem to show similar patterns. This UK government survey covers a sample of over 14,000 respondents and includes a booster sample to ensure that substantial numbers of ethnic and religious minorities were interviewed. Table 1, for example, shows a cross-tabulation of formal volunteering in the last 12 months (based on questions of the type: "Have you done any unpaid work or given help to any organisation?") against practising adherents of several major religions. Practising Jewish respondents show the highest rates of formal volunteering (63%, although sample numbers are very small), followed by (practising adherents of) 'other' religions (which would include such faiths as Bahai, Jain, Pagan, etc.) at over 51%, Christianity at just over 50%, and Buddhism (45%). Those of no religion show rates near the average (39%), with those not practising a religion (35%), together with practising Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, showing below-average rates (around or below 30%). These patterns across different religions broadly hold for other questions tapping formal volunteering in the last month and frequency of volunteering as well as for informal unpaid help to non-kin.

A full and careful multivariate analysis, repeated across different waves of the survey to explore longitudinal trends, would be a major research project but well worth doing. One would hypothesise, and my preliminary analysis along these lines for the 2007 data (a presentation of which is outside the scope of this article) suggests that the effects of the demographic variables identified in the early surveys continue to hold good. Further work is needed to disentangle the effects of *belonging* to a congregation (where ethos, social norms and opportunity to contribute to programmes) from those of *believing* (where theology and values are the drivers of service) and those of personality or individual social circumstances. However, it is not immediately apparent that existing survey data sets from the UK would allow this level of analysis.

In summary one might conclude that people most likely to engage in regular, formal volunteering within an organisational setting are white, middle-aged, affluent, educated, and settled in a local community. Within this context there does seem to be some evidence that such people who have an active faith and involvement in a Christian or Jewish congregation are more likely than non-believers or people of other minority faiths (who are also disproportionately members of ethnolinguistic minorities) to be volunteers in the sense captured by surveys.²⁴ But the

23 DCLG (2008), Department for Communities and Local Government, "Citizenship Survey: 2007–08 (April 2007–March 2008), England & Wales. Cohesion Research Statistical Release 4 June 2008" <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/863680.pdf> accessed 8/2/2011

24 However, on the basis of life experience as a community worker and long-time resident of multiply deprived ethnically and religiously diverse areas, I believe it is important to point out that voluntary service, mutuality, charitable generosity and informal care are far from absent in such communities. Indeed they often flourish, despite the pressures of coping with everyday life on a low income in a difficult environment, but often in informal contexts which are 'below the radar' of what surveys and other official statistics can capture. Studies of "hard-to-document" voluntary action are a growing

evidence from the surveys is far from conclusive, especially in regard to the question of whether faith (spiritual capital) or belonging to an organised religious community (religious capital) can be seen as the most significant factor in motivating people to offer unpaid labour in social welfare settings. As we shall see in the next section, the practice of such enterprises in a church setting can be far more complex than this simple assertion.

Table 1 2007 Citizenship survey on formal volunteering in last 12 months, by religious practice

	Whether practising religion	Formal volunteering in last 12 months		Total
		No	Yes	
Practising Christian	Count	1772	1819	3591
	%	49.3%	50.7%	100.0%
Practising Buddhist	Count	37	30	67
	%	55.2%	44.8%	100.0%
Practising Hindu	Count	377	174	551
	%	68.4%	31.6%	100.0%
Practising Jew	Count	10	17	27
	%	37.0%	63.0%	100.0%
Practising Muslim	Count	1032	397	1429
	%	72.2%	27.8%	100.0%
Practising Sikh	Count	171	71	242
	%	70.7%	29.3%	100.0%
Practising other religion	Count	108	114	222
	%	48.6%	51.4%	100.0%
Non-practising	Count	4014	2219	6233
	%	64.4%	35.6%	100.0%
No religion	Count	1020	662	1682
	%	60.6%	39.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	8541	5503	14044
	%	60.8%	39.2%	100.0%

area in the discipline of voluntary sector studies in the UK (Phillimore, J./McCabe, A./Soteri-Proctor, A. (2010), *Under the radar? Researching unregistered and informal third sector activity*, Third Sector Research Centre/Institute of Applied Social Studies/ School of Social Policy; University of Birmingham,
http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/default/files/UploadedFiles/Research_Events/Phillimore_et_al.pdf
 (accessed 25/5/11))

3. Faith and Volunteering in Practice: A Case Study of a Blurred Environment

In the Christian community centre where I worked for the last four years (as one of only three paid staff) we relied heavily on volunteers to deliver our programmes. These included work to support homeless and destitute people, youth and children's activities, job-seeking support for unemployed people, social and learning activities for older people, and a community computer suite. I managed a team of around 25 community volunteers who gave at least one session a week to our work. There were also about the same number of people (mostly members of the congregation) who regularly contributed unpaid labour in the religious or community activities of the centre and the associated charity shops.

What, then, is the significance of religious and social capital for these volunteers in the work they do for the organisation, or – as one might phrase it elsewhere – “for the Kingdom of God”? How does the unpaid labour they provide contribute to the growth of social and other forms of capital, and to whom does this belong? Can the mobilisation of such unpaid labour be seen as exploitation, and if so, in what sense? What political, ethical and theological issues arise in the context of such volunteering?

The local church (and the Protestant denomination it belongs to) sees itself as an unashamedly evangelical and evangelising movement, though, it must be admitted, it is experiencing limited success among younger generations, as the age profile of its membership and leadership demonstrates. As a deliverer of social services, the denomination remains – impressively – one of the largest charities in the UK, with an annual budget of around £150 million and a workforce of over 3,700 paid employees and 12,000 volunteers. There is a sense in which the spiritual capital expressed in faith, prayer and worship drives and motivates its action and undergirds the religious capital represented by its financial and human resources, organisational structures and capacity. However, the style and ethos in its community programmes are not to ‘Bible-bash’ or aggressively proclaim the importance of Christian faith and the need for salvation. At the local level in our centre, the invested religious capital (and the economic capital linked with it) was in the form of a large modern multipurpose building, the organisational and network resources we managed to muster and the programme of activities delivered using paid and unpaid labour.

But what does religious and spiritual capital mean to the diverse team of volunteers themselves? The team included:

1. A group of a dozen or so faithful and prayerful elderly ladies with lifelong links to the church, who work in the charity shop, in other fundraising activities, and in the religious and community ministry with their peer group.
2. A group of about a dozen middle-aged and young people (in secular employment) who play a full part in the religious life of the church and who give time and energy (in evenings and at weekends) to children and youth work sessions and

to outreach events such as an annual summer community fun day and an Xmas Xtravaganza event each December.

3. The team of around 25 community volunteers who are not involved in the religious life of the church but who give freely of their time and skills to the community programme. They have included volunteers with a range of (and sometimes a mixture of) motives, including active Christians from other churches, volunteers driven by their social or political concerns, 'therapeutic' volunteers with disabilities or physical or mental health problems who benefit from filling their time with useful activity in a social setting, unemployed volunteers who see personal value and better prospects for future employment in keeping active, and student volunteers who gain required experience for their courses and future careers. In particular the team included:

- Three or four retired people who would probably call themselves Christians but are not actively practising (two of them speak of the value of getting out of the house and away from "she who must be obeyed!").
- A Filipino woman recently arrived in the UK who is a practising Roman Catholic but who was recommended to do voluntary work by employment advisers as a way of improving her skills and fluency in English while waiting for her work permit to be granted.
- Three well-qualified people of working age with no overt faith commitment who have become unemployed during the recent recession and who simply want to do something worthwhile while they seek work. They came in contact with us through our 'job club' project, which offered support and guidance for those looking for paid employment.
- Two highly talented and qualified working-age men recuperating from ME/chronic fatigue syndrome and who are testing out possibilities in the hope of being able to return to at least part-time work. They both happen to be highly committed evangelical Christians, in sympathy with the centre's Christian ethos and recruited through church networks, but worshipping members of other local churches.
- Half a dozen female students from the local university or college of further education (some of them on social work courses), mostly with no strong faith commitment (though one is a Muslim), who are doing voluntary work to gain experience and improve their CVs and/or as a course requirement.
- An unemployed IT professional who is a convinced atheist, although his father is an Anglican vicar.
- A young locally born Muslim woman who chose always to wear Islamic dress including the full niqab face covering but who wanted to offer service outside the confines of her own faith community.

- A number of 'economically inactive' people with significant mental health issues or mild learning difficulties who were recommended to us and who are often accompanied by their support workers, who see volunteering as an element of therapy.

It is important to note there was a distinction of status between the community volunteers and the church members who served but who would not usually describe themselves as volunteers.²⁵ The former group operated under a formal volunteering policy which included the need for references, a criminal record check and a written 'contract' which spelled out expectations. The church volunteers operated much more informally and flexibly and only had to undergo criminal record checks if working with children.

All of these volunteers willingly offered considerable amounts of unpaid labour in the context of a Christian centre whose ethos clearly demonstrates a particular variety of religious capital. Their work also clearly had an economic value to the centre and the church. They also contributed to and benefited from the stock of (bonding, bridging and linking) social capital accumulated in the everyday life of a church and community centre. Yet their motivations and the level and quality of personal spiritual capital they brought to the work, or that motivated them, are extremely diverse. Indeed, for some of them the concept of spiritual capital might be problematic or meaningless. Nor is it clear how their unpaid labour contributed to the religious capital of the church, especially since very few of the community volunteers or the service users of the centre's programme ever made the transition to attendance at worship or prayer meetings or to membership of the congregation.

4. The Underlying Economics of a Faith-Based Project

Before reflecting on the ethical and theological questions raised around unpaid labour in the context of this blurring of secular and religious space for social activity, it is necessary to undertake a brief excursus into the underlying economics of the centre. The new building was constructed in 2005 using capital resources from the denomination, the sale of the former building, some grants from charitable trust foundations, and a subsidy from a local government regeneration programme. Additional government capital grants were given for the installation of computer equipment for an adult education room and the development of a community garden. The operating costs of the building and programme of community activities, including staff salaries, were covered through funds raised in a variety of ways which included:

25 see Cameron, H. (1999), 'Are members volunteers? An exploration of the concept of membership drawing upon studies of the local church', Voluntary Action, Institute for Volunteering Research, London.

- Regular offerings from the congregation.
- Direct charitable donations from the general public, including house-to-house and street collections.
- Trading income from the charity shops, the rental of rooms to community groups, and charges to motorists for use of the car park.
- Grants and project funding from local government.

Despite these multiple sources of funding, budgets were always very stretched, especially so in the context of economic recession, with the result that in 2010 one member of staff was made redundant. The services provided by the centre could clearly not survive without the unpaid labour of volunteers. This is an important favourable factor when seeking government funding, as the authorities perceive that such centres can provide excellent value for money in delivering low-level welfare services. Indeed, in some funding application and monitoring forms they encourage organisations to calculate the economic value of volunteer hours and count this as 'matched funding'. In addition, local authorities value such buildings as venues for hosting the delivery of certain outreach services provided by public sector staff in a location which may be less threatening and more accessible to marginalised people than a municipal office.

For such reasons it is clearly in the interests of the local and national welfare agencies to support the work of such a faith-based centre. The cost to the church of such arrangements is a form of accountability that tends to shift the mission and ethos away from explicit proclamation of Christian faith. Evidence is required not only of financial transparency and integrity, but also of compliance with legislation requiring equal access, service and employment rights for people of all faiths, ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations. Furthermore, records of services offered must be kept in order to compile monitoring statistics used in evaluating the impact of the service. Within the ethos of this particular denomination and its community services, such requirements are not felt to be particularly problematic in principle, merely an irritating piece of bureaucracy for busy staff. However, for some more fundamentalist Christian denominations, where the verbal proclamation of the Gospel and the explicit promotion of traditional moral values are central to their ethos, conflicts can and do arise, and churches may choose not to accept any government funding (Farnell et al., 2003, p.27). Even in the case of our denomination, which has a strict prohibition against all forms of gambling, there is a self-denying ordinance not to apply for the extensive funding available for community work from the proceeds of the National Lottery.

5. Ethical/Theological Questions

In the context of a communitarian discourse under the New Labour government (1997–2010) and now of ‘the Big Society’ under the current coalition, voluntary groups, including faith-based congregations and charities, are being drawn into partnership relationships with the state. A broad consensus about balancing the rights and responsibilities of citizens is producing a growing expectation that everyone should be making a proper contribution to the economic and social welfare of the community. However, at a time of economic crisis and uncertainty, economic forces in global capitalism are likely to produce an ever-increasing search for market efficiency, coupled with stronger coercive measures to encourage compliance from welfare recipients. Caught between the pressures of the state and the market, it seems increasingly problematic for the third sector, including faith-based congregations and charities, to maintain its freedom and independence, in terms of values, ethos, and financial sustainability.²⁶

On the basis of the story and analysis I have presented, the question about exploitation of unpaid labour does not lend itself to a simple black and white answer. The generally happy and non-conflictual relationships between volunteers, the centre staff and the church suggests an absence of coercion and oppression, and therefore that the term ‘exploitation’ could only be applied in a very weak sense. At the most, the church and its mission in the community benefited from the unpaid labour of volunteers, allowing it to accumulate religious and social capital it could not afford to pay for in cash and to provide services that it could not otherwise deliver. There is clearly a sense in which the state exploits such organisations in offering a degree of financial support, allowing cut-price services to be delivered to groups where government has limited duties or political advantage to gain. These include providing food, shelter and support for the street homeless, many of whom are prone to addictions and anti-social behaviour. It is in this sense that faith communities can be seen as offering added value to the work of the contemporary (and retrenching) welfare state. But usually the exploitation involves a willing partner, as the church gains some finance which sustains its institutional life and enhances its reputation and self-image as a dispenser of good works.

²⁶ These tensions often lead to theological reflection among practitioners of church-related community work. Despite many cultural, political and economic differences between contemporary Western democracies and the first-century Roman Empire, a fundamental question for many Christians remains as it was in the time of the New Testament: whether it is Mammon, Caesar or Christ who is to be worshipped as Lord. Yet insofar as the church resists a strictly sectarian approach to these issues, it is a question that needs to be addressed in a variety of messy local contexts. For all of us through paying taxes as citizens “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” and enjoy the protection and benefits provided by the state. Furthermore there are numerous precedents in Scripture for God’s people drawing on secular rights and resources, such as Paul asserting his status as a Roman citizen, to the slaves of the Exodus gathering Egyptian gold and Nehemiah using an Imperial grant for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

From the perspective of most of the volunteers, there would appear to be little sense of being exploited. For some there is an immediate reward in terms of fulfilling a requirement for an academic course, or finding a sense of worth or belonging in interaction in a community setting, or a useful and productive way of filling time during a stage of life when paid employment is not available (a social capital benefit). For others the pay-off may be long-term and uncertain in the form of potential future employability (a human capital benefit which may later be cashed in economically). Studies of voluntary action using exchange theory such as Abrams/Bulmer²⁷ and Titmuss²⁸ on the gift relationship in blood donation suggest there is always an element of a quid pro quo in volunteering. Even if it is only there in a vague and diffuse way, there is an expectation that mutuality is a basic norm of social life: I make a free contribution to the community today, and one rainy day in the future I will receive help in return.

However, exchange theory cannot explain all aspects of volunteering as long as some measure of altruism continues to be expressed. For loving one's neighbour as oneself is a deeply embedded principle and commonly shared value, even in a post-Christendom society. For people of faith, especially perhaps among Christians, such values are often made explicit and expressed in terms of being a good Samaritan. But those with an awareness that they also offer spiritual capital to the work they do, also bring an understanding that unpaid service has value that goes beyond the economic. For such individuals, caring cannot be reduced to cash. They may instead use the language of grace and gift, of sharing God's love, or experience their relationship with Christ, or see in their diaconal service a significant growth in their personal spiritual capital.

There is, however, a limitation to volunteer-led services delivered in such faith-based centres as ours and to understanding them in terms that fail to go beyond Samaritanism:²⁹ it is the problem of service user dependency. In projects such as the soup kitchen for the homeless it proved very difficult to undertake community development or a significant level of empowerment. Part of this difficulty was intrinsic, as many of the service users were trapped in chaotic, alcohol- or drug-dependent lifestyles, where volatile behaviour would make their contribution even to routine work such as serving food or washing up a risky enterprise. Indeed it was church policy to keep a firm boundary between volunteers and homeless service users, although other service users such as elderly people and people with disabilities, learning difficulties or mental health issues could more easily become involved in voluntary service. Although the reasons for this approach have a reasonable basis, it does have clear limitations, and can be seen as contradicting some fundamental Christian values such as human dignity, equality of status and the principle of *koinonia* by which all members are enjoined to contribute in proportion to what

27 Abrams P./Bulmer M. (1986), *Neighbours: The work of Philip Abrams*, Cambridge.

28 Titmuss, R. (1970), *The Gift Relationship*, London.

29 Morisy, A. (1997), *Beyond the Good Samaritan, Community Ministry and Mission*, London.

they have received, their “treasure, time and talents” to the body of Christ (the Church) and, by extension, to the secular community.

A social praxis based on charity and voluntary service can also be seen as neglecting or even detrimental to the prophetic imperative to speak and work for social justice. However, this criticism is unfair, as for many social activists it is the very involvement in voluntary service among marginalised people that has raised their awareness of injustice and started them on the road to campaigning and political involvement. And indeed the denominational authorities, together with other faith leaders in the UK, are often in the forefront of campaigns for the rights of marginalised people.

The final ethical issue which needs to be addressed is whether the church should become involved in schemes for unemployed people to undertake unpaid work. This is of particular relevance in the light of current government proposals for welfare reform, under part of which unemployed benefit claimants are to be required to take part in four weeks of unpaid community work on pain of losing their payments.³⁰ In fact similar schemes, albeit with a lower level of coercion, already exist and the experience in our case study church centre shows a mixed picture. Where the unemployed person had previously been in a skilled job, came voluntarily to offer that skill to the project, and was in control of the hours and times to be worked, the placement usually proved valuable and successful on both sides. In contrasting cases, where the person had few skills, was long-term unemployed or had never previously worked, and where there was a threat of sanctions from the authorities, the placement was usually a drain on the resources and energies of the centre. Lack of enthusiasm and reliability and the low level of practical and social skills among candidates for such placements could mean that the quality of service might suffer, to the embarrassment of the church. It is apparent therefore that there are practical considerations suggesting caution about church involvement in such schemes. Beyond that remains a political, ethical and theological issue: can it be right for a Christian organisation to collude with the state in schemes for unpaid labour which coerce or impoverish people who are already living on the margins of society? Or would this, as I am inclined to believe, be crossing a dangerous line between exploitation in the context of exchange and oppression?

6. Conclusion: The Value of Different Forms of Capital

What, then, is the value of the various forms of capital discussed above to individual volunteers, to religious institutions and to wider society? Our account has sug-

30 DWP (2010), UK government white paper on welfare reform, Section 3.4 at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/universal-credit-chapter3.pdf> (accessed 19/11/10)

gested that the deployment or exploitation (in the weak sense) of unpaid labour – as long as it is offered as a gift or in exchange rather than coerced – adds value to diaconal service and the provision of social welfare. Economic capital accrues to the religious or voluntary organisation and to society as a whole through volunteering, even though the volunteer makes no immediate financial gain. Human capital may increase all round as confidence and skills grow through the volunteering experience, although for the organisation this may be only a short-term gain, as the volunteers who benefit most from training and on-the-job learning are usually the first to move on to paid employment. Social capital of both bonding and bridging forms is likely to grow in contexts of cooperative volunteering, increasing levels of well-being and the sense of community cohesion for individuals, organisations and the wider society. While this can usually be counted as a common good, we should note that in some contexts the strong bonding social capital of a tight-knit and inward-looking group of volunteers within a project or church can have negative exclusionary consequences.

Religious capital as we have tried to define it is a property of organisations such as churches, temples or other faith-based institutions. The unpaid labour of volunteers, whether or not they are believers or members of the faith community, will clearly serve to sustain and increase the group's stock of religious capital. This in turn can be offered as service to the wider community. Even if service is restricted to the faith community, it should be of benefit to the whole society since its members are nonetheless a subset of the citizens of the state in which they reside.

Spiritual capital, on the other hand, is by our definition a more individual resource. In mixed, blurred or diverse religious and social contexts spirituality and faith-based motivations may be seen as irrelevant, or even contested, by volunteers who are not believers (or who believe strongly in a different faith) and by secular authorities. This can also be the case for voluntary or originally religious organisations which have little or no desire to promote faith or proselytise. However, for churches and faith-saturated organisations where a mission of diaconal service is seen as linked with evangelical proclamation, the increase of spiritual capital must be a priority. While a certain level of social welfare and community action can be sustained in the short term by religious organisations which rely on volunteers and paid staff of various faiths and none, long-term survival is unlikely without a renewal of spiritual capital. Because, ultimately, churches and other religious organisations depend on the recruitment and retention of members who are believers and who bring and develop spiritual capital that motivates them to offer their talents, time and treasure in the service of their God, their faith community and their society. In a mixed society they will not be the only people who offer such service, but the evidence suggests they do so disproportionately. But they alone, through an investment of their spiritual capital in various kinds of service, will make a large and lasting contribution to institutions which accumulate stocks of religious capital that can subsequently be transformed into social, human, and economic capital and a more universal human flourishing.

The discourse around the various forms of capital must remain ambivalent and disturbing when set alongside ethical concerns about justice in labour relations and the theological demand to resist turning relationships of care and everything else into commodities with a market value, thereby serving Mammon. Nonetheless, the argument outlined above also suggests that a 'virtuous cycle' of capital production can occur when spiritual values and theological motivation are connected to practical action in diaconal ministry.

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