

Dichotomy of religion as simultaneously promoting strife and unity – a social capital perspective on Christianity

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Abstract

Religion is acknowledged as responsible for factioning of the people of the world, as well as for the strife amongst the various religious factions. The ministries and teachings of Christianity in the New Testament are considered from a social capital perspective – networks (groups), norms and trust – towards understanding of strife or unity. The ministries of Christ are distinctly anti the social capital in the then Jewish territories, as is the case of the epistles to the non-Jewish perishes. The prevailing normative principles are frequently censured, and the confrontational manner in which the established social groups are interacted with, exacerbated by the totally inclusive but absolutely exclusive principles, is deemed inexcusable and results in execution of Christ and a number of his followers. The threat to the trust amongst the Jewish citizens; between the general populous and religious leaders proves a major driving force in persecutions. The social capital perspective of the New Testament easily transcends into our reality of today and supports the relevance of Christian principles two thousand years later.

Keywords: Social capital, social groups, norms, inclusive and exclusive, diversity, unity.

Introduction

“As the world grows smaller, you might think it would be easier for human beings to recognize how similar we are.... And yet somehow, given the dizzying pace of globalization, the cultural levelling of modernity....”, bemoans the outgoing US President, Barack Obama (2015:1). Vast progress in communications, technology and travel has resulted in the experience of the universe as shrinking. The concept of a global village is now reality, inhabitants are interdependent and share a common fate. China, once a disparate and isolated community, so aptly symbolised by the Great Wall of China, is today an integral part of the world economy. Economic analysts are able to relate the impact of devaluation of the Chinese currency, or a slowdown in its economy, or a crash in its stock exchange to hardships for economies and citizens the world over. Cooperation and unity often remains elusive in this global village; Greece calls for a referendum on its continued participation in the European Union (EU), as does the United Kingdom on remaining a member of the EU, itself unravelling as Scotland goes to the polls to decide on its possible withdrawal from the United Kingdom.

Over and above the obvious challenges created by the need to balance the interests of the national citizens with those of the collective in a cooperative endeavour, diversity presents as one of the factors which complicates effective and efficient cooperation. Even when simply listing aspects of possible differences amongst people, the variables of culture and ethnicity rank highly. These include language, skin colour, customs, values, religion and world views. Whereas most of these ethnic and cultural differences embody opposing forces to unity to a greater or lesser extent, religion constitutes a unique contradiction. Although religion is inextricably part of culture, the basis for faction, the top five religions in the world

all span national borders and all preach unity within (Hackett, Cooperman and Ritchey 2015). Accepting the premise that in the human condition, religious convictions represent the dominant value system, how are the separatist tendencies amongst nations with a common religion explained? Even within the transnational representative bodies of religions, faction according to ethnicity and culture is found. In pursuit of unity, is religion an opposing force that should actively diminished, or is it a promoting force that needs to be emphasised?

The discrepancy of religion as concomitantly uniting and separating will be explored by applying a social capital perspective to Christianity.

Social capital and networks

In broad terms, Parts (2004: 6) explains the concept of social capital as "... the institutions, social relationships, networks, trust and norms shaping the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions". Putnam (2000) was responsible for 'social capital' gaining universal acceptance, consisting of networks, norms and trust. The definitive literature is found in the decade spanning his work and the concept has subsequently been applied to various contexts.¹

Networks are central to the phenomenon of social capital (Pollit, 2002). Similarly, this study adopts the perspective that relations, and thus the trust and norms associated with social capital, reside in networks. Before the term social capital was adopted, it was referred to as "networks", and is still used interchangeably since it is the network that exemplifies the norms and trust. We still network today to build social capital. The concept of networks, in the context of social capital, is synonymous with groupings of people in the social organisation of society. Groups are formed according to a variety of possible commonalities that people share. Some of these traits are discussed later.

Closed networks, as described by Ng (2004), are cohesive and result from frequent social interactions where every individual is directly or indirectly connected to the others. This property of closed networks creates a high density of social relationships that produces homogenous and clustering behaviours. It thus follows that, as a consequence, closed networks exhibit a normative environment with a high degree of social convention – the spin-off being by the reduction of uncertainty through trust. Ng (2004) postulates that, from a relational perspective, the differences between closed and diverse networks are based on a social space reflecting near versus distant social relationships.

Repeated interaction between actors is pivotal in the establishment and sustainment of social capital, and leads to trust development. Healy (2004:13) observes that trust is process-based (thus the requirement of repeated interaction), "... testing each other regularly, firstly on discreet exchanges of limited risk, then to more open-ended deals exposing parties to substantial risk." Trust thus develops over time; 'Individuals learn by experience and update their expectations' (Ahn and Ostrom, 2008:81). Searing (2013) distinguishes horizontal trust - interpersonal trust - from vertical trust or institutional trust. As a result of established trust relationships, organisational ties often result from personal ties. Konoirdos (2005: 4) credits trust as the bonding element of social capital, and, also as the bridging element between external networks. At societal level, it has been shown that in unequal societies, trust amongst individuals is at a low level (Jordahl, 2009). Grimalda and Mittone (2011) go as far as to conclude that trust in other people could be widely regarded as a key determinant for a society's economic performance.

¹ See Acqaah, Amoako-Gyampah, and Nyathi (2014) for Social Capital in South Africa

Norms, and the ancillary normative aspects of relations, constitute cognitive social capital, including those common and shared goals which sustain group cohesion (Healy 2004). He makes two pertinent observations regarding norms in relations:

- 1) that a sense of who one is, where one belongs and which norms of behaviour are acceptable, constitutes an important component of social interaction; and
- 2) significantly though, these rules of engagement are typically informal, tacit and probably not even consciously acknowledged or codified.

Social norms result from repeated interactions in which the particular norms are socialised and internalised by network participants. This is consistent with Healy's (2004:13) observations on the evolution of trust noted before, reaffirming that trust and norms are inextricably linked. It could thus be argued that the congruency in norms significantly contributes to homogeneity of a network, and in doing so it is responsible for the extent of exclusivity associated with a network.

Norms and trust are the pillars of reciprocity - the accumulation of obligations and interpersonal credits. Both Coleman (1990) and Putnam (2000) explain reciprocity as an obligation to repay an acquired debt originating from a positive action received by the self. Trust may be focused on specific people in whom some confidence is placed, such as family, friends and neighbours, or it may be people in general in a given neighbourhood or wider society where norms of reciprocity prevail. This confidence embodies the element of trust that these obligations will be honoured. Healy (2004) reiterates that trust and norms come together in reciprocity – as trust evolves, so do norms of reciprocity. Reciprocity arises from donation of favours, which, in turn, generate a series of expectations that one can rely on others to return in the future. The Coleman (1990) and Putnam (2000) perspectives reinforce Healy's (2004) perception of trust as a belief in the good intentions of others, or at least in their capacity to deliver on their promises and intentions; a product of mutual obligations. Reciprocity is crucial to social capital to the extent that Lin (2008:59) has shown it to be a basis for grading of relations. Very close relations lead to the highest expectations of reciprocity.

Social factors of social capital

In the seminal literature three variables of social organisation have been shown to be especially influential in forming social capital, namely proximity, relatedness and culture. Proximity reflects the fact that frequent exposure results from being in the same space, a prerequisite for development of social capital (Putnam, 2000). In their analysis of various studies on impersonal but frequent electronic communication (e.g. social media), Bachetti, Antonio and Faillo (2011:243) note “a positive and significant correlation between the reduction of social distance and the frequency of non-selfish and cooperative choices”. Relatedness is best understood by its direct manifestation as bonding social capital, where the relation facilitates the bonding, typically a result of connections and ties among families or specific ethnic or kinship-based groups (Edelman et al. 2004).

Bourdieu (1986) broadened the notion of social capital by introducing the role of culture. Putnam (2000) followed and included aspects of culture, beliefs and institutions in his perspectives on social capital. It follows then that cultural social capital will be identifiable (Hsung, Lin and Breiger, 2009). Expanding on the concept of culture, Putnam coined the terms “bonding social capital” (Putnam, 2000: 362) and “bridging social capital” (Putnam, 2000: 78). Bonding social capital refers to that facet of social networks that results from its characteristic of homogeneity (by class, creed, ethnicity, gender); whereas bridging social capital refers to the transcending of the differences amongst members (those characteristics that are not common), the heterogeneity characteristic of a network. The relations and

coherence of the group (network) is a continuously fluid equilibrium of bonding and bridging, of homogeneity and heterogeneity. Bridging social capital is especially relevant in linking networks that share some members.

Coleman (1990) and Putnam (2000) emphasise the existence of conflict based on class or social interest. Warren (2008: 144) also refers to “cultural vulnerabilities” that are related to the normative rules and expectations embedded in networks, where ethnic communalism acts as a social trap for those within, and as bad social capital for those on the outside. Kristiansen (2004) sees a correlation between culture and the phenomenon of exclusivity, concluding that ethnicity, religion and class are common bases of faction. He perceives culture to be “a collective subjectivity, thus a shared set of values, norms and beliefs” (Kristiansen 2004:1151). Borgatti and Foster (2003) observe that physical proximity, the similarity of beliefs and attitudes and the amount of interaction and effective ties have all been found to be interrelated.

The phenomenon of homophily - based on the concept of social proximity and a function of homogeneity and exclusivity - describes the tendency of people to interact more with their own kind, whether by preference or induced by opportunity constraints (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001). They concluded that social proximity is typically a function of similarity of individual characteristics such as race, gender, educational class and organisational unit. On the positive side, interacting exclusively with similar others is thought to be efficient since similarity facilitates transmission of tacit knowledge (Cross, Borgatti and Parker, 2001). It simplifies coordination and avoids potential conflicts (Healy, 2004). On the other hand, limited communication with dissimilar others prevents a group from reaping the benefits of diversity and promotes us-against-them thinking (Edelman et al. 2004). Homophily is characteristic of the inner layer of relations, and as relations transcend this inner circle, they are more heterophilous, assuming a bridging characteristic (Lin, 2008).

A social capital perspective on Christianity

This discussion of the promotion of strife or unity considers the ministries, teachings and enunciations on which Christianity² is based. These are evaluated from the perspective of the constituents of social capital, namely networks, norms and trust. The New Testament is interrogated as an account of the ministries of Christ and the teachings of the apostles to guide Christians. The interactions with the prevailing social establishment and communities, the normative environment and practices, and the impact on relations are analysed, as well as the directives regarding these variables to Christians. Social capital variables such as spatial relation and proximity, interaction, conformation and trust, and culture are explored.

Social capital at the dawn of Christianity

For the purposes of a discussion of social capital, a distinction is made between two social contexts prevalent the New Testament. Firstly, the historically Jewish territories into which Christ was born, lived and died, and where the first Christian congregation was established, and secondly, the non-Jewish territories where the Apostles missioned. Although it is not suggested that the non-Jewish territories were homogeneous, considering Jewish territories separately is motivated by the fact that Christ and his apostles were from the Jewish community. Just (2012:1) provides a distinction between the ethnic, national and religious groups of the world during the life of Christ. Firstly, there were the Ancient Jews, their

² Although the term Christian is coined much later, it is applied retrospectively.

ancestors, and their descendants; "Children of Abraham" - people who claim Abraham as their father (whether literally or figuratively, by birth or by faith). This term encompasses Jews, Arabs, Muslims, Samaritans, and Christians. Secondly, the Non-Jewish groups in the Ancient World; denoted by terms such as Samaritans - people from the region of Samaria, Gentiles - a general term referring to any and all people who are not Jews, and, Christians - not just one ethnic or national group, but all people who believe in Jesus as the "Christ".

Roman occupation of Britannia, Spain, Gaul, Northern Africa and Asia Minor characterised the political scene. During the life of Christ, social organisation of Israel and Judea was dominated by the Roman occupation and rule. Luke provides the social backdrop:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. (Luke 3:1-2)

Antipas (later taking his father, Herod's name) had a Samaritan mother but was educated Roman. Annas, the high priest, ruled Judea during the birth of Christ, but was shortly afterwards succeeded by his son-in-law, Caiaphas. As the Roman governor in Judea, Pontius Pilate had to contend with numerous violent Jewish uprisings (Gardner, 1981). Both Herod and Caiaphas – although by no means anti-Jewish - supported Pilate's efforts to oppress the outbreaks so as to prevent full-scale Roman retaliation:

So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish" (John 11:47-50)

As for the networks, there were a number of religio-political groups in the Jewish territories. Just (2001:1) relates: "Judaism at the time of Jesus was both unified and divided, much like Christianity is today. All Jews believed and practiced some core aspects of their religion (Monotheism, the Law of Moses, Circumcision, etc.), but different Jewish groups debated and disagreed with each other about many details (expectations of the Messiah, ritual and purity laws, how to live under foreign domination, etc.)".

He distinguishes the groups as follows: firstly those with a more religious emphasis, Pharisees - a group of influential Jews active in Palestine from 2nd century BCE through 1st century CE; they advocated and adhered to strict observance of the Sabbath rest, purity rituals, tithing, and food restrictions based on the Hebrew Scriptures and on later traditions. Sadducees were another prominent group of Jews in Palestine from 2nd century BCE through 1st century CE; they were probably smaller "elite" group, but even more influential than the Pharisees; they followed the laws of the Hebrew Bible (the Torah), but rejected newer traditions. The Essenes were a smaller group or "sect" that lived a communal "monastic" lifestyle at Qumram (near the Dead Sea) from 2nd century BCE through 1st century CE. They are not mentioned in the bible but the "Dead Sea Scrolls" found in this location in 1947 are associated with them. Then, the High Priest, Chief Priests, Priests, and Levites were members of the tribe of Levi who were responsible for the temple and its sacrifices, and thus were the religious and social leaders of the Jewish people. The Scribes were men specially trained in writing, and thus influential as interpreters and teachers of the Law, and agents of the rulers.

The Elders were the "older men" of a community who formed the ruling elite and were often members of official "councils". There were disciples of John the Baptist, during his lifetime and for several centuries thereafter, certain groups of people considered themselves followers of John the Baptist; some of them became Christians, but others maintained that John was earlier and more important than Jesus. The followers of Jesus of Nazareth - starting with smaller numbers of Jews in Galilee and Judea during his lifetime, those who believed in Jesus grew over the decades, spreading the "Jesus Movement" to other nations, cultures, and languages throughout the ancient Mediterranean. The two main politically-orientated were the Herodians, a faction that supported the pro-Roman policies and government of the Herodian family, especially during the time of Herod Antipas, ruler over Galilee and Perea during the lifetimes of John the Baptist and of Jesus. The Zealots were one of several different "revolutionary" groups in the 1st century CE who opposed the Roman occupation of Israel.

Although the factions were not militantly opposed, some of the differences were fundamental and interaction even became physical:

And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamour arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks. (Acts 23:7-10)

In a society as fractioned as this, levels of trust were inevitably low. Herod, father of Antipas, executed three of his sons whom he perceived to threaten his throne, his son Archelaus was banished by the Emperor over his oppressive and harsh rule, and, Antipas and Caiaphas both openly supported Roman rule (Gardner, 1981). The Jewish council was made up of priests and elders and was headed by Annas, and the then High Priest Caiaphas, and they actively conspired with Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus and also brought false accusations against him (Mark 14:55-59).

As had been typical during the preceding times of foreign oppression, during Roman rule, as an act of repentance, the normative environment was characterised by a general return to traditional Jewish practises (norms) such as honouring the Sabbath, washing of hands and not mixing with other races (van der Watt and Tolmie, 2005). The normative environment was derived from the seven pillars of Judaism (Just 2014:1) which were:

Election - the people of Israel are "chosen" by God; they are to be "holy" ("set apart"; different from other nations), Land - the "Holy Land" was "promised" by God to be theirs forever; a "land flowing with milk and honey", Monotheism - there is only One God (Deut 6:4), Law - core in "Decalogue" (10 Commandments); also the whole "Torah" (Five Books of Moses) and the whole Bible, Monarchy - the Davidic dynasty ("House of David") should reign as kings over Israel forever, Temple - the "House of God" should be in Jerusalem, so that God can dwell in the midst of his people, and, Messiah - when the covenants are broken, God will raise up an "anointed" leader to restore the nation to God, and to restore the earth to peace and justice with no more war, disease, death, etc. (exact expectations vary).

Some of the Pharisees were also Christians (Acts 15:5), most notably Paul, but also a Pharisee named Nicodemus, "a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." (John 3:1-2), and "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. (John 12:42-43). Others were also positively

disposed towards Jesus; "At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you" (Luke 13:31). "

Christianity –a new inclusive covenant that excludes

How is it that Christianity is a crime against society (where society equates social capital) that would justify capital punishment for its proponents; Christ by crucifixion, Stephen by stoning, and James by the sword? The covenants in the Old Testament provides perspective to the claim of all-inclusive access to salvation Christianity affords, irrespective of descent, but also absolute exclusion on rejection thereof, also irrespective of ancestry. As noted above, covenants were central to Judaism. Just (2014:1) relates to five covenants in the Old Testament. The first two were for all people, those with Adam and Eve, and with Noah. Three covenants were made to the benefit of Jews exclusively, with Abraham, Moses and David. The essence of the clash between Christianity and the prevailing Jewish social norms is captured in the statement: "In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete." (Hebrews 8:13), Christians thus claim the pervasive Jewish social capital to be obsolete.

Although Christianity is an extension the Abrahamic religion, and the gospels emphasise the grounding thereof in the prophecies of the Old Testament:

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"³ (which means, God with us). (Matthew 1:22-23),

John the Baptist is said "For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight."⁴ (Matthew 3:3)

It does advocate a "new covenant" (Luke 20:20) that supersedes the previous Abrahamic covenant. Just (2014:1) terms it the 'New or Renewed Covenant' in reference to Jeremiah 31:31; "a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah". Jewish society vehemently rejects the notion of a new covenant; "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains un-lifted, because only through Christ is it taken away." (2 Corinthians 3:14). The new covenant threatens Jewish status of God's chosen. The Abrahamic covenant is not only declared redundant, but it is criticised as flawed:

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. (Hebrews 8:6-9)

In addition to criticising the existing covenant, Christianity further diminishes the essence of Judaism as God's chosen when it proposes redemption to all people:

³ Isaiah 7:14

⁴ Isaiah 40:3

“So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." (Acts 10:34-35), and,

“They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world." (John 4:42).

Paul reaffirms this; “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1John 2:1-2), as does Timothy, “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Christ further diminishes their social status when he announces that Jewish descent does not secure salvation, “I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:11-12).

There appear to be some contradictions in the gospels regarding the extent of the ministries of Christ on earth, exclusive – Jews only – as opposed to inclusive – Jews and non-Jews. When a Canaanite woman begs Jesus to heal her sick child, “He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24), and also, “These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 10:5-6). A possible explanation of the apparent exclusive dedication to ministering to Jews is found in the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:16-24) where the slave first invites specific guests – Jews – and then everyone else that is prepared to except – non-Jews. This view is supported when Christ says:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:46-48).

Then in an apparent contradiction, we read:

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. (John 4:9, 40-41)

On a number of occasions the Jewish displeasure with Christ and his disciples' non-observance of social practices are evident:

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" (Matthew 9:14). Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." (Matthew 15:1-2). The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. (John 5:15). Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. (John 9:16)

Christianity, as a religion and component of social capital, acts as a basis for social group (network) formation and is thus by definition exclusive. Members of this all-inclusive Christian faith have but one single universally common conviction; "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16). Morrisson (2002:5) stresses this requirement to the exclusion of all else; “Christianity is a belief in a person. Not in a set of doctrines, a creed, or other statement of beliefs. Not in a liturgy or ritual. Not in an institution. Not in a program. Not even in Scripture, important though Scripture is. All these have their value. But the essential foundation of Christianity is belief in the person of Jesus Christ.”

The counter of a single common conviction as motivation for forming the group, is that the absence of such conviction is also then absolutely exclusionary to group membership. Jesus said to Thomas: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Exclusion from the group constitutes condemnation:

Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, and these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

(Matthew 25:32-34,46)

This pronouncement is absolutely factionalist and excludes all those that do not share the same beliefs. A number of Christian practises and beliefs maintain, and even accentuate, the social distance. Cross membership and multiple membership of religion-based groups is not tolerated, exclusivity is the first of the Ten Commandments; "You shall have no other gods before me.", and, "You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:3-5). The apostles reaffirm this to Christians; "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (1 Corinthians 10:21).

Reed (2009:1) concludes that "Jesus was exclusionary as both He and His apostles were adamant that those who refused to do His Will would be excluded from His blessings, and openly warned that they would partake of His wrath." Christians also refer to themselves as "... God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, ..." (Colossians 3:12) which challenges the Jewish status as God's chosen.

Christianity – critical, confrontational and subversive

In the preceding section the criticism of the especially the Abrahamic covenant was evident. The theme of confrontation is found throughout the New Testament. Christians are continuously engaged in an inner battle between good and evil, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing" (Romans 7:18-19), and this extends to a battle with a sinful world, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2). Paul relates to this as war, "Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:11-12).

It is often hard to reconcile Christianity which is based in love (1 Corinthians 13:4), and in the grace of God – Christ suffering in our stead (Romans 5:15), and of love amongst fellow Christians (John 13:35), and even love for enemies (Matthew 5:44), with the forthright confrontational attitude of Christ towards the Jewish religious leadership. This extends to the pervasive strife of Christians with the world (John 12:25) that is central to the gospels and the rest of the New Testament. Christ forewarns his followers of the impending confrontations:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (Matthew 10:34-36)

A number of the confrontations between Christ or his apostles and Jewish leaders can be related back differences of interpretation of the concept of sin⁵, central to the Jewish norms. Critical to the friction between Jews and Christians is the understanding of what constitutes sin. Jewish views, based in the Old Testament, define sin as transgression of the commandments of God; So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold" (Exodus 32:31) which God punishes without exception, "keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:7). Sinning results in condemnation, "Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them" (Deuteronomy 27:26) and rewards for not sinning "... to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes ...so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel" (Deuteronomy 17:19-20). These views held by the Jews are clearly reflected in the following passage; "As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:1-3).

Christ advocates a principles-based view to sin, as opposed to the rules-based Old Testament beliefs, and thus reiterates that no one is just and thus no one can achieve salvation through works (obedience to the law), effectively condemning all of Jewish faith. The doctrine of salvation through grace and belief in Christ is in direct confrontation with the performance religion of the Jews (see rebuke of the Lawyers): "yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified." (Galatians 2:16). "He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matthew 5:13), suggesting that culture and tradition has eroded true devotion and that the existing norms and practises are astray.

Christ goes beyond making pronouncements on what sin is, to actually forgiving people their sins, "And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:5-7). Over and above forgiving sins as God would, Christ actually professes to be the Son of God, "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." (John 5:15-18), and "I and the Father are one. The Jews picked up stones again to stone him" (John 10:30-31). Christ again condemns those that do not believe in Him, as they would not be believing in God himself.

It is significant that confrontation is obliged to be public and openly, for all to see. Christians are directed to engage the world on their faith "because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Romans 10:9-10), and Christ said: "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33). This is a

⁵ Transgression of the commandment of love for god and fellow man (Matthew 22:36-40); extended to include:

Actions ("All wrongdoing is sin" (1 John 5:17)); omissions, ("So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (James 4:17)); thoughts, ("For out of the heart come evil thoughts"; "... looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:19, 28)); breach of conscience ("For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. (Romans 14:23)) (Ashley, 1997)

principle is evident on numerous occasions, "Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same" (Matthew 26:34-35). The gravity of Peter then denying Christ is portrayed by "And he went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62).

The actions of the apostles reflect absolute adherence, even to the death; "So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:18-20), and Stephen becomes the first martyr:

Stephen said to the high priest, elders and scribes when brought before the council; "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." (Acts 7:51-53)

Christ and his disciples also show no regard for the existing exclusivity rules of Jewish social networks by having relations with unclean people and non-Jews:

And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Mark 2:15-16)

Their challenge is turned against the leaders and depicts them as opposing good deeds:

One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. (Luke 14:1-4)

Every confrontation in which the Jewish leaders are portrayed as erroneous potentially erodes the public opinion and poses a threat to the legitimacy and the trust of the community:

So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:3-9)

He effectively humiliates them publically by calling them fools, greedy, wicked and unmarked graves, and then continues to denounce the Lawyers as well:

And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you. "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it. One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also." And he said, "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of

Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."
(Luke 11:37-54)

The public standing of the scribes and Pharisees was founded in their knowledge of the Scriptures. Christ, "religiously illiterate", on numerous occasions publically highlights their lack of knowledge:

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, "'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions. (Matthew 22:41-46), "The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." (Matthew 21:25-27). And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions (Mark 12:32-34).

Christ, in as many words, accuses them of lacking knowledge of their god and bible, "But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching (Matthew 22:29-33).

Even the parables Christ told were slightly masked; "And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him" and, "And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away." (Mark 12:12). "Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" (Matthew 15:12).

Inevitably the confrontation with the Jewish normative status quo impacts the trust in social capital. Christ directly erodes the levels of trust; "Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.", "Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:6,12), and, "Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice." (Matthew 23:1-3). This correlates with the "cleansing of the temple" which is an indictment against the priests which the priests could not forgive. Roberts (2010:19) explains this, over and above the inference of the priests as robbers, by linking Christ's choice of "robber's den" to Jeremiah 7, "In the day of Jeremiah, the people had turned the temple into a "den of robbers," a place of supposed safety for those who did evil deeds out in the world. For this reason, God promised to destroy the temple."

From a social capital perspective it is not hard to appreciate that confrontations between Christ and the Jewish establishment could plausibly have contributed to his crucifixion.

These confrontations motivate the decision to have Christ killed: “The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. (Mark 3:6), and, “It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him,” (Mark 14:1). Reed (2009:1) states that “Jesus was confrontational in that he boldly told people the Truth, and He readily exposed sin, error, and lawless conduct. He was neither ashamed or afraid to confront those who rejected the gospel.” Gatlin (2013) concurs; “Jesus was intolerant of sin and those who promoted it” and adds, “Jesus was confrontational toward those who knew the truth but rejected it.” In social capital terms, Christianity threatened the norms, trust and the position (status) of the actors in networks. Roberts (2010:18) concludes: “He was a threat to their conception of faith and national life, indeed, to the very existence of the Jewish people. If left unchecked, Jesus would either pervert the Jewish nation with his peculiar notions of the kingdom of God, or he would bring down the wrath of Rome upon Judea, leading to its destruction”.

Conclusions

Social capital – networks, norms and trust – provides a novel platform from which the way in which Christianity promotes strife and unity can be explored, described and understood. The constituents of social capital are also inherent to our generation and this exposition of Christianity supports the learnings of the New Testament – the new covenant – in today’s reality. The context of the social networks and groups of the New Testament are readily recognisable in our current global context. War, oppression, global and national politicking, multi-culturalism, and divergent religious beliefs and practises to this day prevail. The pursuit of a global normative blue-print is still impeded by global diversity. The United Nations Organization – all but united – is grappling with the challenges of a unified approach to basic human rights, human trafficking, to environmental protection, to fair trade and to conformation to anti-oppressive political practices and equality of race and gender. In this supposedly technologically advanced age we have not even managed to eradicate hunger and poverty, Christs’ words of two thousand years ago inevitably comes to mind: “For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me” (Mark 14:7).

The segregation of social groups still remains contentious, Apartheid is a case in point, as is the dissolution of the USSR (United of Soviet Socialist Republics) over two decades ago and the pursuit of self-determination by its various ethnic groups. The recent referendum in Scotland to remain in the United Kingdom is evident of a reawakening of nationalism, masked by the pervasive Irish Republican Army (IRA) activities. Factionalism and religious extremism was once again stirred-up with the Gulf war of the Nineties and culminated in the infamous September 11 attacks in New York city. The Arab Spring and the war in Tunisia, Libya and the Middle East fought by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), and the campaigns of posting Internet videos of beheadings of soldiers, civilians, journalists and aid workers, and its practise of destroying cultural heritage sites are trending in world news. The thousands of Syrian refugees have led to the implosion of international border crossings and tensions amongst the European countries, a real humanitarian crisis. The latest are claims by ISIS that strike fear in Christian countries:

Islamic State, also referred to as IS and ISIS, is believed to be actively smuggling deadly gunmen across the sparsely-guarded 565-mile Turkish border and on to richer European nations, he revealed. They are following the well-trodden route taken by refugees and migrants fleeing, travelling across the border of Turkey then on boats across to Greece and through Europe. There are now more than 4,000 covert ISIS gunmen "ready" across the

European Union, he claimed. He said: "It's our dream that there should be a caliphate not only in Syria but in all the world," he said "and we will have it soon, God willing." (Brown 2015:1)

This has led to a number of Islamic groups distancing themselves from ISIS.

Strife and unity within Christianity has to this day remained high on the agenda of discussions amongst the various leaders. Race, ethnicity, language, and dogma provide for diversity which impedes perfect unity. Yet, unity within diversity still remains elusive.

The social capital perspective reaffirms the relevance today of the ministries of two thousand years ago.

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