

## Some Anglican Social Responses Countering the Thatcherite Socio-economic Dogmatism: A reading by an outsider with an inside-insight



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### **Preamble:**

Margaret Thatcher, the first female, three-times Prime Minister of Britain (1979 -1990), also known as ‘The Iron Lady’, assailed by internal feuds and the poll tax crisis, was basically ousted by her own colleagues. She was succeeded by the comparatively weak Tory leadership of John Major, only to allow a Labour regime of Tony Blair at Westminster. He was also three times PM (1997-2007), but arrived at a dead end, shamefully aping the leadership across the pond in Washington DC regime under George W. Bush, particularly over Iraq. The rest is history, creating a bitterly divided world more so via the 9/11 destruction of the twin towers in New York, July 2005 London Bombings, the rise and fall of IS and the American First campaign of the devastatingly pathetic presidency of Donald Trump. The global health crisis caused by the vicious virus Covid19 since end of 2019 until the time of writing this piece in July 2021 even though the vaccinations are being rolled out to the global population, a catastrophe far from being over.

History seemed to stop in the entire year 2020 and the next half of 2021 too. I am not referring to the evidence less speculation of Francis Fukuyama in the late 1990s with the equally speculative thesis of the *Clash of Civilizations* by Samuel Huntington. These two revised their original theses substantially<sup>1</sup> or least their disciples have now reinterpreted arguably to salvage their gurus of arguably ‘a doom prophesy’. It is in this context that the people might wish to imagine or reimagine socio-politically afresh as if to fix the ‘havoc with the hope’ of returning to ‘a relative normality’ which the world desires desperately.

However, in this article I want to revisit ‘the recent British past’, particularly the years I was living in the British Isles, looking for imaginative work in the late 90s. It may look like 30-year-old history, but the impact seems perennial. It is in this scenario that I wish to suggest this reflective piece for those interested. Also, I tab these paragraphs as a tribute to the

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<sup>1</sup>. See. Fukuyama’s *Identity: Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, NY. 2018. Here as some argue he clarifies his previous thesis ‘end of history’ while some others suggest as an apology. However, Fukuyama more than Huntington was intellectually honest about his ‘after thought’ in this 2018 text.

Anglican Communion with the Non-Conformist traditions in the UK that adopted me for my skills and practice with the imaginative leaps we designed together, as *an outsider but with an inside insight*<sup>2</sup> which they helped me evolve and to whom I am indebted.

Those with whom I travelled were a good bunch with erudition, critical thinking and of course with maddening fun in our social dealings and leisure. I admire those men and women who never gave up dreaming which is what makes us irresistibly imaginative and critically alternative thinkers of what the “other side of the fence” might be for all. I am arguing that the political imagination of the incisive series of reports and their critique of the *status quo* of the then British regime of Margret Thatcher was an oasis for her government, elucidating a jargon of a conservative paradigm, that ‘there is no alternative’ (TNA) to the new world order. While the counterpoint was that ‘there are other alternatives’ (TOA). It was as if a triumph of liberal democracy which American intellectuals like Huntington and Fukuyama influenced by the neo liberal agenda and took upon themselves as providing sociological fodder for political mapping that I hope to discuss in the rest of this article.

### **Introduction:**

The concept of the ‘faithful capital’, an idea from the Commission on Urban Life and Faith<sup>3</sup> signifies a renewed understanding of faith in action and actions in faithfulness to the tradition that people believe and belong to. A robust ‘return to religious faith’ and ‘resurgence of faith’ convey an astute rootedness, affirmation of identity in one’s faith, also indicate a conquest for space and social mobility in the public domain. The tendency of a ‘return of religion’ and a sense of ‘return to religion’ in the secular realms and their manifestations portray both a possibility of an investment in that ‘faithful capital’. Such intended social change might be hopeful while the un-channeled ‘religious fervor’ may be starkly counterproductive and lead to the balkanisation of society that the very religious traditions campaign to foster and, now in 2021 having its effects since the Brexit on the British isles too, including Northern Ireland and Scotland and their political future. It is decisive time for Great Britain right now, as I write this piece, since there are geopolitical signs that it might become a ‘small Britain’ for all kinds of reasons and reasoning, with reignited “troubles” in Northern Ireland and Scotland into polls - balkanizing or uniting factors as Paul Weller, a British scholar poignantly states, could such lead to a (dis) United Kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

### **British Shift:**

It is not just a post Brexit economics, fiscal and the socio-political shifts that I am talking about. More conspicuously the religious landscape of Britain has changed tremendously over

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<sup>2</sup>. This subtext the drawing from the title of the article is state that I during my time in the UK could read the political mood of the time as if an insider but remaining outside. Some identified it as ‘a possible get away position’. But I did not consider it that way, was to me a process of political education of the former colonial master, an interesting place to be.

<sup>3</sup>. A call for celebration, vision and justice, this report ‘ Faithful Cities was a work of an ecumenical and interfaith Commission initiated by the Church of England and presented to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, May 23, 2006, See. <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2006/05/commission-on-urban-life-and-faith-report.aspx> retrieved on 22 June 2021

<sup>4</sup>. See his extensive discussion, *Brexit: A Colonial Boomerang in a Populist World, Social Justice*, Vol.41, no 196, March/ April 2019 pp. 8-11.

the last 50 with the migration of the South Asian communities from East Africa, Kashmir (Mirpur and Kotli districts of what they call as Azad Kashmir) and other Northern parts of India (Gujarat). However, the Windrush migrations remain the primary migrations into the UK since the end of WWII. But its Christian heritage made some attempts at assimilation even though race issues were felt more strongly. In both cases (Caribbean and South Asia) unprecedented sociological changes have occurred in a definitive way in the life of Great Britain. However, Britain contains a certain cultural resilience to such socio-politically volatile shocks and sharp changes since the end of its colonial project bitterly opposed in South Asia particularly. Some political and social critics are of the view that there is a 'blowback effect' which indicates a reverse colonisation process by the former colonies of the British Raj. A serious study of this 'blowback effect' is indeed worthy of socio-anthropological and ethnographic study. Edward Said, in my reading opened the flood gates which now have ushered in postcolonial and subaltern studies as separate disciplines. But a study on Britain with its responses from Normans to Poles would be still a fascinating study.

The inner cities are a tapestry of world's cultures, religious traditions and languages that I encountered since my first piece of work in Bedfordshire and a few years later in Leicester, the Gujarati capital of the Western world. This visible and pronounced diversity in all major and medium size cities has revolutionized the understanding of community, relationships, culture, religion and behaviour permanently pushing all defined boundaries which Britain maintained as a perceived mono culture. Even though the non-white population of Britain is less than 8% yet the impact of this visible presence of culturally, socially, religiously different communities more specifically settled in the inner cities have become the designers of a 'New Britain' as they claim a Britishness hitherto unknown. It has almost become a political category in some quarters of the public domain in Britain.

In this backdrop the *Faith in the City* report (1985) was produced by the Anglican Commission on Urban Priority Areas. It focused on the rapidly changing context of the inner city life of the UK. Twenty years later the Anglican Commission on Urban Life & Faith engages with the intense diversity of inner cities in yet another report *Faithful Cities* (2006) with key issues and debates of social cohesion and regeneration in the country. However, the new issues since the pandemic in early 2020 have impacted the same inner-city contexts in the UK with serious political implications. Because the numbers of the infected population and the mortality rates have risen within these inner cities as clear and accurate statistics are yet to be made public.

The faith communities have been profoundly silenced as some of their meeting places have been under the locked down regulations. All religious institutions have been challenged to their core in terms of theological response and to make sense of the symbolism of 'non-physical presence', silence and shut downs. For civil protection, Holy communion, praying shoulder to shoulder, *langa* and other colourful festivals are not permitted. Religions have yet to find meaning for these problems, which have arisen since the first attack of the pandemic and then the second and the third wave of the Covid19 variants infecting the

populations even late as July of 2021. The British shift is clear as much as any other scenario and the continental Europe (the EU) that plunged into the opportunity as if to punish Westminster was ‘unfair’ because there was less flexibility in the ‘deal’ but the British scenario did not also help for a ‘fair deal’. Who won in the game, history might be the best judge, as in many cases?

Revisiting both reports above provided evidence-based material, analysis and direction for all interested in social change, political lobbying, dynamics of faith and spirituality. This essay, while reflecting and acknowledging the fertile tapestry of faith traditions within the UK, argues that it is important to recognise, affirm, and enhance the user-led-faith-community work and their institutional infrastructure in the present inner-city contexts. This could be productive, if harnessed, while at the same time it may be socially disruptive if the diverse communities were to adapt ‘conquest of space dynamics’ on the basis of religious and cultural differences and pronged to create a ‘religious other’ contestant and even inimical.

The communities rooted in different faith traditions are obliged therefore by their affiliation to faiths’ inner vitality to search for new ways of being effective instruments of social change, spiritual revival and cultural resurgence processes in contemporary society. The paper critically challenges all faith communities to immerse and engage in socio-political, religio-cultural and inter-community bridge building if the ‘faithful’ wish to coexist in diversity or self-annihilate in isolation.

### **Market Economy, its Politics and Social Critique:**

Thatcherism<sup>5</sup> in its heydays was characterized by a free market economy, monetarist economic policy, privatisation<sup>6</sup> of state-owned industries, low direct taxation but conversely higher indirect taxation, opposition to trade unions through state regulation. Thatcherism modelled itself on the North American Reganomics<sup>7</sup> and its political direction in governance and international relations. The ‘right’ definition involves a mixture of free markets, financial discipline, firm control over public expenditure, tax

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<sup>5</sup>. It is the system of political thought attributed to the governments of Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990. Thatcher was unusual among British Conservative Prime Ministers in that she was a highly ideological leader and ‘Thatcherism’ is characterized by decreased state intervention via the free market economy, monetarist economic policy, privatisation of state-owned industries, lower direct taxation and higher indirect taxation, opposition to trade unions, and a reduction of the size of the Welfare State. ‘Thatcherism’ may be compared with Reganomics in the United States, Reganomics (which I refer to elsewhere in the paper) in New Zealand and economic rationalism in Australia. Thatcher was deeply in favour of individualism over collectivism. I interpret Thatcherite ideology also as a clever political imagination but that which resented political dissent and counter political imagination, and if such did exist, presumably was alluded as Marxist or Communist which was an obsessive compulsive behaviour of many Western political leaders of the time. In my view such also lacked the political imagination for an alternative.

<sup>6</sup>. From France to the Philippines, from Jamaica to Japan, from Malaysia to Mexico, from Sri Lanka to Singapore, privatisation is on the move... “The policies we have pioneered are catching on in country after country. We Conservatives believe in popular capitalism—believe in a property-owning democracy. And it works!” Speech to Conservative Central Council by M. Thatcher (15 March, 1986).

<sup>7</sup>. It refers to the economic policies promoted by Ronald Reagan from 1981 to 1989 in the US. The four pillars of Reagan’s economic policy were to: a) reduce the growth of government spending, b) reduce marginal tax rates on income from labour and capital, c) reduce regulation, d) control the money supply to reduce inflation.

cuts, nationalism, ‘Victorian values’, privatization and a dash of populism. These have had adverse effects in poorer sections of society across the nations laying the foundation for globalisation of capital and financial speculations. The Thatcherites believed in economic liberalism and claimed in 1983 that “We have a duty to make sure that every penny piece we raise in taxation is spent wisely and well. For it is our party which is dedicated to good housekeeping” was the most quoted Thatcherite political dictum but failed the people at the bottom of the social ladder.

*Faith in the City* report in 1985 made 61 recommendations: 38 of them to the Church of England, and 23 to the Government and Nation. The church as a faith community was asked to identify its “urban priority area” parishes. Interestingly, the report addressed directly the Department for the Environment, indicators relating to the 1981 census data. From the recommendations to the Church of England the six indicators were: levels of unemployment, overcrowding, households lacking basic amenities, pensioners living alone, ethnic origin, and single parent households. The Covid19 assault on health was probably more felt on the same population in the context of the UK and reiterates that urban priority areas as a tense matter for concern.

The Recommendations to Government and Nation were specific - taking in the rate of support grant, the urban programmes, levels of overtime working, community programmes, supplementary benefit, child benefit, the taxation system, ethnic records, housing availability and allocation, homelessness, care in the community, law centres and law enforcement. Hence, the incumbent government was directly challenged to deliver and in fact Thatcher seemed to have said that the report was Marxist in its analysis and that it lacked a certain British liberal thinking. But to her amazement many defended the report as being forthright in its approach and analysis of the existing social and economic condition of British society. I am of the view that the report provided through its social and poverty analysis of some crucial areas where the faith communities could involve themselves as active catalysts in civil society for genuine social change and political maturity. The third term of the Labour regime under Blair and then Brown because of their undefined so called ‘third way’ was yet another failed experiment and worse was proven under John Major and Cameron regimes. The urban regeneration processes continued but sluggishly as there was no enthusiastic direction from these subsequent governments.

The propositions in the reports in fact provided fresh thinking and political imagination to the British public who in some measure were disgruntled by the iron fist of the incumbent political leadership, which found solid alliance with the Washington politics of the Regan administration. An alternative thinking was being proposed by this courageous report for alternative political critique when the Westminster’s political slogan remained that there is no alternative (TINA) which in my view was the first indication of total political obstinacy in epic proportion of the Thatcherite era which was bound to fall as such was incompatible with the British ethos hitherto known to the world.

### **A Watershed Report:**

The report (*Faith in the city*) obviously caused immediate controversy in the political corridors of Westminster. An unnamed conservative cabinet minister was reported as dismissing the report - before it was published - as ‘pure Marxist theology’ and another conservative MP claimed the report proved that the Anglican Church was governed by a “load of Communist clerics”. According to David Sheppard, the late Bishop of Liverpool, although the report was loudly ‘rubbished’ by some senior conservative politicians, these attacks had the benefit of making *Faith in the City* famous and worthwhile. The report triggered extensive public and media debate regarding Thatcherite political ethics, urban decay, the modern role of governance of the first sector<sup>8</sup> and the epochal relevance of the Church as a faith community to indicate the growing divide between rich and poor in 1980s Britain. As a result of this report the Church Urban Fund (CUF)<sup>9</sup> was created in 1988, subsequently by 2005 it raised and distributed more than £55m to over 4,400 local faith related initiatives in the poorest areas across the country. Then by 2021 it might have its disbursement indeed through diversified strategies for urban regeneration in three significant areas through creatively designed three structures:

1. *Together Network* with 21 faith-based partnerships across England (enthusing the faith based human development strategy).
2. *Near Neighbours* that helped to make their communities stronger, not about religion, class or ethnicity, but about community working with the local governments with significant funding regimes for local projects.
3. *Just Finance Foundation* supporting fair financial systems to help and support those excluded in unjust financial operations. Build knowledge and budgeting skills so that people and manage spending and create sense of saving.

*Faith in the City* (1985) report initiated discussion across the nation and interestingly created a movement within the Church. It showed that common concerns could be harnessed for public good. The 2006 *Faithful Cities* report takes seriously the social, religious and political activism of faith communities in the same inner city context as a response and a continuation of the quest to identify and articulate religious resurgence and spiritual fervor. In my reading the *Faithful Cities* report implicitly points towards two movements in contemporary society in Britain. The following paragraphs intend to relate these two movements that are central to most religious traditions particularly in the last 3 decades. They remain alive though might be dormant in certain parts of the world. Both Anglican responses (reports) contoured in these two movements and hence the reason for me to explicate what they mean really, how they function and effect in different manifestations across the traditions and the world at large. This revisit to both reports, and to assess their impact on the world today even though priorities have shifted, is still an important task especially at the time that all religious traditions are struggling to find

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<sup>8</sup>. The first sector is the national level of administration (in the case of USA, India or Australia, is known as the federal level) and the second sector is the local government (Municipality or Commune like in some of the Scandinavian countries) and the third sector is the voluntary and the community groups (this specific sector has a strong impact on policy development and political critique particularly in Britain). The third sector is acutely key to the political imagination that is being discussed in this paper. This sector is what gives energy to the civic rights of the people as it indicates a healthy practice of democracy and people’s engagement at the grassroots even though it is most feared by those in power at all levels.

<sup>9</sup>. See. <http://www.cuf.org.uk/> for a comprehensive understanding of the ethos of the Church Urban Fund.

meaning in their 'faith expressions' and God in this pandemic since 2019 running into two years in a few months in 2021.

### **Detecting Movements:**

I intend to elaborate here in the next few paragraphs and focus on the two movements which I have observed and studied like many others in the similar discipline and ground work<sup>10</sup>. The first movement is a sense and a direction embroiled in a *Return of Religion* tendency. Secondly it's a movement clamouring to *Return to Religion*. These are two distinct movements but related to each other, each with several and sometimes contradictory agendas overlapping each other, requiring an analysis and to be reviewed from within the wider debate on religion and its relevance to modernity and its multi-disciplinary discourses. These two Returns also indicate a perennial discussion and debate on religion, politics of the Right, the Left or the Centre and its public face as well as the cultural shifts that religion has undergone, especially with the prominently visible Diasporas in the inner cities of the Global Capitals. They are there to stay and have indeed contributed to these returns which I am naming for your careful attention and in view of further discussion.

### **Two Returns:**

These are two comparably significant movements of *return of religion* and *return to religion*<sup>11</sup> in the context of political arrangements and their future in modern societies. Are such movements worth taking seriously or could we assess as to what directions they may be pursued and also whether it's worth investing in them as social and political catalysts for change and community cohesion?

In the last twenty years, major and medium size cities right across Western, Northern and Southern Europe have dramatically changed their demography, ethnic, religious and cultural landscapes permanently. Recent geopolitical developments and the deployment of terror as a means of redress alongside counter mechanisms to arrest the situation with the politics of war on terror campaign have considerably relativised all known methods of governance, political imagination, civil liberty and community relations. These global scenarios have posed new and severe challenges to all religious traditions, cultural moorings and democratic forms of life across not just Europe but the world community at large. No nation, no polity, no community is spared of their impact.

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<sup>10</sup>. I would like to refer to these two areas in more sociological reading as a 'discipline of the desk' and the 'discipline in the field'. It is something hard to bring together, activism and critical scholarship, interestingly some of us have attempted it.

<sup>11</sup>. These two movements indicate; a) Return of religion is a religio-socio-political tendency bringing religion and its symbolism to the public domain as an assertive view of defining those individuals and communities giving them identity and political space. It is in this context that certain individuals and small groups of people belonging to those traditions mobilise their 'link religion' as a political tool to redress grievances to the extent of usurping political power at local, national levels with international consequences. b) Secondly, return to religion has also developed a tendency within the same tradition to revisit the core of its primordial message laying emphasis on the vastness of its specific spiritual and its ability to emulate people and elevate them as sensibly functional individuals and communities. However, the most used, misused and perhaps abused (in)famous word 'fundamentalism' in my view falls in between these two movements edging its infectious impact on each of them pushing their boundaries to be misunderstood than understood (I also further explain the same in the text below to further indicate the crucial distinction between the two movements and their inner affinities and almost divided loyalty to notions of 'fundamentalism'.

Community behaviours, cultural forms and other social and political relations are adversely changing and the responses on the part of some communities are obviously not as rapid as the programatised changes put before them. Such was proven in the climax of the “America First” campaign with devastating effects also crossing Atlantic into Europe. Britain has to redefine its infamous common interest with the United States, since the War on Terror by Bush and Blair which the later publicly announced as historically unbreakable and culturally bonded. Even though such might be true in history yet new politics of engagement have taken different routes, hence rules of engagements have shifted calling for change of goal posts, and even the referees.

These two key movements can easily be recognized right across the globe among many other aspects of globalisation processes but more so since the War on Terror. The two movements seem to be taking place concurrently, face to face and side by side. The first movement or the tendency is a public display of *return of religion*, which is about groups of highly motivated individuals thinking that their religious affiliations as the ultimate point of reference that may give them not only identity and meaning, but also more specifically as a means to redress grievances. In the closing decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religion re-emerged as a contentious issue in country after country. Samuel Huntington observed: “The late 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen the global resurgence of religions around the world.”<sup>12</sup> Karen Armstrong, reiterates that “One of the most startling developments of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the emergence within every major religious tradition of a militant piety known as ‘fundamentalism’... this religious resurgence has taken many observers by surprise”<sup>13</sup>

The second is a general tendency or a movement of several religious traditions to *return to religion* in terms of rejuvenation of their pristine teachings, revisiting their core message, rooting the communities to understand a code of conduct among its membership in a new way as a positive approach to spirituality, portraying its capability to provide a comprehensive character formation. To consider that religion is not a source of conflict but a resource for transformation, influencing social and even political change. The new wave of religious activism is driven by serious believers of many faiths - Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others - all of whom are incessantly opposed to many of the values commonly accepted by ‘modern secular society’. Two examples can be cited here. First, it is well-known that the re-election of George W. Bush Jr. in 2004 to some extent was determined by the pro-life/pro-choice debate, and the Roman Catholic voter base with heavy influence by the Catholic lobby of the United States seemed to have joined their regular rivals of Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions all over the nation to support single issue- pro-life agenda. Secondly, both the ultra-orthodox Jews and the conservative Muslim Ulema and their other fellow Muslims came forward in solidarity to oppose the Gay Pride Parade in December 2006 in the streets of Tel Aviv setting aside their perpetual rivalry that they maintain towards each other. Though their specific beliefs and the worldview in most instances are diametrically opposed

<sup>12</sup>. See Huntington, S., (1996) *The clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order*, Touchstone, NY, p. 64

<sup>13</sup>. See Armstrong, K., (2000), *Battle for God*, HarperColinsPublishers, London, p.ix



to each other yet they share the ultimate goal of restructuring and ordering society on the basis of their scriptural beliefs and practices to conform to specific norms and jurisdictions. Whether this is the right approach or the best method of such restructuring of society and sense of community is yet to be judged. It remains controversial, enigmatic and morally problematic in the face of political militancy, which is sometimes expressed via heinous and violent ways. What is it with some of these traditions that make a soft approach to one another in the face of a common enemy but remain inimical to each other with truth claims and battle for God as if God requires humans to handle the cause of God in fairness.

### **Religion and Politics of the Secular Project:**

French researcher Gilles Kepel, in his book *The Revenge of God*,<sup>14</sup> has carefully documented this largely unexpected turn of events. The simultaneous appearance of fundamentalist religious movements on a global scale has major implications for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which according to Huntington, 'is dawning as a century of religion' that some fear and therefore should be marginalised. Society is witnessing a major shift in the course of human history, and is moving along a path no longer parochial but alarmingly global, thus seemingly unmanageable as if everyone has lost their grip and a sense of direction. Secular leaders and scholars have been surprised by the *return of religion*, because they put their faith in the assumption that modernization would lead to secularization and to the decline of religion. This idea - the so-called 'secularization theory' - is widely accepted in academic and political circles but now seems untenable. It assumes that as societies modernize and become more secular, religion will wither away as an archaic and useless branch of knowledge. Their assumption was that if religion became irrelevant, and human beings became more reasonable, they would dwell together in peace and happiness in a modernized world and they thought that religion was irrational and should be made redundant. However, human history did not follow this 'reasonable' path to a secular utopia. The closing decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provided a massive falsification of the idea. Peter Berger, one of the world's leading sociologists of religion, says "that modernization and secularization will lead to a decline in religion; instead, we are witnessing a massive upsurge in religion around the world".<sup>15</sup> This resurgence of religion has also played a part in an increasing number of violent conflicts around the world. Secular intellectuals and the elite have been shocked by this development, because it is proving that their fundamental assumptions about human beings and human society are wrong. The modern secular notion that religion is archaic and irrelevant has caused many to overlook the importance of religion in human affairs.

As a result, they have been taken by surprise with the *return of religion* in most colorful forms and manifestations. Berger reiterates that "those who neglect religion in their

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<sup>14</sup>. See. Kepel. G., (1994) *Revenge of God: Resurgence of Islam, Judaism and Christianity in the Modern World* (trans.) Alan Braley, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 1-12.

<sup>15</sup>. Berger, P.W., (1999), (ed.) *The De-secularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p. 6

analysis of contemporary affairs do so at great peril”<sup>16</sup> as there is sufficient evidence to indicate a robust and a definitive *return of religion*. But what is it that has spawned the modern revival of religion to robustly campaign for a critical appraisal of secular society and its agenda? It is a view that the collapse of the ideological camps (led by the US and its allies & the USSR and its satellite states) which flourished during the cold war, the challenge of the post structural deconstructionist epistemology on the highly esteemed mega narratives (Judeo-Christian & Islamic) and the postmodern thinking in every sphere of life; demand that something new emerge in the midst of confusion and apparent disorder. Sociologists and anthropologists seem to have been by passed by the cloud technology, and rapidly speeding digital platforms of seeking new knowledge. It was clear that a new wave of consolidating the disintegrated views, ideas, patterns of logic, rationality and forms of life were in the making. Political ideas, social movements, economic gaps, democratic deficits, national and tribal rivalries and internal frustrations of communities had to be articulated through some medium. Religion, in my view was the popular, available and the most accessible vehicle with which such aspects could find viable reincarnation and a renewed expression. Religion and its social critique posed a formidable challenge to the rapid and accelerated movement of the globalization of the agendas subscribed by the financial and trade institutions, more so now since the assault of the callous pandemic.

### **Investing in ‘Faithful Capital’ as Returning to Religion:**

The *Faithful Cities* report, (2006) in my view is a response and a public sense of a *return to religion* which is a spiritual revival that is identifiable right across faith traditions. It has taken place at different levels, increasing the number of groups focusing on the primordial religious experience of those gone before, revisiting the scriptural moorings and more charismatic manifestations of spiritual self-understanding. The academia, the researchers, data analysts, social planners, economists and political theorists are baffled, astounded by the levels of public display and revivalist plethora within all faiths from Curiciba to Colombo, London to Lima, Konya to Kanyakumari, Accra to Agra. This global sense of religious revival, sociologists like Peter Berger clarify as bestowed on the adherents a new form of identity close to home. He confirms that “people are making more choices in everything, from lifestyle to sexual identity. It’s not surprising if they are making more choices in religion, and the era when religion was determined solely by accident of birth is over”.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Berger refers to both movements as new manifestations of religious fervour and resurgence.

The two movements, the *return of religion* and *return to religion* are two distinctive sides of the coin as one feeds on the other. The examples are many but the question remains what political or social change this ‘faithful capital’ can bring to this century. Of these movements what the stakeholders and other institutions should invest, in my view, is not necessarily the *return of religion* but *return to religion* where energy and resources are of high calibre that could be deployed to order

<sup>16</sup>. *ibid.* p.18.

<sup>17</sup>. See. [BiblicalRecorder.org/content/news/](http://BiblicalRecorder.org/content/news/)

society and communities and to give direction to political re-structuration and developing democratic forms of governance. A *return to religion* agenda provides an ethic both in conduct and behaviour, culture and politics, business and trade, as it has the capacity to revive each of these civilisational motifs to change attitudes to effect social and political change. This specific thought then obviously evokes the political imagination of the masses to create a space in a post Covid world, especially to resolutely and robustly respond to havoc in the hope of a future where communities come together to rebuild anew forms, from human behaviour to attitude towards wellbeing, values and even religion itself.

### **Post Brexit and Covid**

The two challenges are incalculable not just for the current regime of the UK but the entire global community. No complete assessment has been done by any of the colossal socio-political and fiscal implications for the nations. The governments are desperate, all strata including vaccination processes are politicized just like the way PM Thatcher said “well there is no such thing as society”. Did she predict it? No, she did not but the fact of the matter is that it was how she and Ronald Regan perhaps alongside John Paul II wished the world to be free of communism. All three are no more but whatever they wished had not come true, they predicted that Russia be absorbed by the West and that be converted to Roman Catholicism as if it is the ‘true faith’. Nothing of the sort has happened. The *Confucian way* seemed to have emerged from the dormant Sino world and taking its route via the South Pacific, into the Indian Ocean to the Gulf and to the Mediterranean waters and into the heart of Europe.

Thatcher, Regan and John Paul II might have been right then, but proven deadly wrong in each of their analyses and programming the future strategy within less than 25 years which signifies wrong advice and strategy. They never predicted the rise of the dragon but were always obsessed with the death of the roulette and the rubble. Whether it was Regan, Bushes, Clinton, Obama. Trump or Biden, or Thatcher, Blair, Major, Cameron or Johnston, John Paul II or Benedict XVI, they all ran a show that perhaps did not appease the global economics, also basically it was the financial institutions that led their governments. Here now the world is facing new challenges different to theirs.

When Regan came to power, he declared ‘a new world order’, but wanted the US to be the head of that order, and obviously it was chaos that he inflicted. Thatcher aped it uncritically and so was JP II and this was an ‘Unholy Alliance’ that crippled the world permanently. It is in this context that the Anglicans managed to think the ‘otherwise’ in terms of the social capital they experienced in their own context at least by several in leadership position within the Church of England and further afield. Their developed ecumenical association not without deficits perhaps also helped them to critically appraise and engage with the communities at large alongside other denominations.

### **Supremacy Unsustainable:**

Religious resurgence worldwide takes place and continues into this decade as well. The danger is that if they tend to overtly self-focus, this could unpalatably ignite selfhood, proclaiming a 'holier than thou' position and a strong flavor of chosen-ness, and even a sense of supremacy in the very act of these returns. The religious revivals and the return of religion to the civic life even though are more pronounced yet there are serious deficits in these returns as they are yet to harness the revitalised community energies. One such starkly obvious deficit is that the religious resurgence in a specific tradition, instead of emulating the universal appeal of that tradition, would tend to particularize its uniqueness and its manifestation in sectarian repositioning, tribal nuances and behaviors, then unknowingly denying the very basic tenants of its universality and its core spiritual values. This could happen to any tradition. Within certain Muslim manifestations this is more evidently visible than in others while some others could be operating in other cycles and circles unknown to public scrutiny.

The adherents of faith traditions, considered as faithful capital in the *Faithful Cities 2006* report, could be most appropriately invested to further develop the much dented social capital. Such dented social capital has been caused through economic deprivation, abject poverty, lack of resources, inaccessibility to information and other dominant socio-political categories which have penetrated communities through globalised financial capital and its marriage to the market-pronged economy. This global scenario should neither be undermined nor over-emphasized. Globalism in whatever manifestation requires checks and balances as it operates in a given context. It seems to me that even some democratic forms of structures have failed to monitor the sweeping impact of globalization especially on less economically viable communities. It is logical that one aspect of *return of religion* in socio-anthropological terms is a natural means to redress grievances and it has obviously created an ideological front to preserve an identity motif as perhaps religion is found to be the only available *modus operandi* to counteract the unwarranted socio-cultural penetration by various manifestations of Globalisation.

The politics of *return to religion* has devised its own specific *modus operandi* as a religio-spiritual revival to face up to the new challenge of homogenization<sup>18</sup> and secularity in their communities. The result has been a response with volcanic social protests to these winds of change both in revitalizing (*return to religion*) what was basically receding to archaic forms and the other gathering momentum (*return of religion*) in repulsive acts of violence. Both are justified by groups as the only available means to response to the cultural, social, political and economic assault on their communities.

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<sup>18</sup>. This specific concept signifies a tendency of 'all eggs in one basket' mentality which in fact is a post modern characteristic whereby one reduces the significance of difference in society. Some communities resist the top down processes that treat them **wo?** become one in the whole. In fact some of the reasons for today's conflicts are the attempt and the treatment of smaller communities to subscribe to the majority will of a given context. See. *Ethno nationalism in the Face of Cultural Universalism, An Analysis of the Sri Lankan Sinhala Buddhist Claims to Order Society*. Hettitachchi, Shanhtikumar, *Philosophical Perspectives on Globalization*, (ed.) Cam. P., Imana, R. A. & Van Duc, p., APPEND Philosophy Series: Vol. 5 Korean Commission for UNESCO, The Asia Pacific Philosophy Education Network for Democracy, 2006, pp. 171-187. I discuss here extensively the consequences of the homogenization processes forced by globalization as a complete disregard of the contextual ethnic, religious, cultural make up of people as a recipe for disintegration and conflict.

This confrontational atmosphere has created a fear psychosis and uncertainties around the globe not just of violence that we see on electronic and printed media but by very drastic changes taking place too much too quickly in every sphere of life.

### **Conclusion:**

Religion is back on centre stage and will remain as a major a player both locally and globally. The religion and state debate, religion and politics discourse will continue with conflict and violence edging the very core of religion and what it stands for. The secular project and its own campaign to privatize religion will also continue to marginalize religion and beliefs from public and secular realms. However, the assault on religion may not be a feasible agenda as the present wave of revivalism is phenomenal. It is assessed that at least five new church groups are initiated every week in Africa, A Muslim imam, a Hindu priest, or a television preacher somewhere in the globe is addressing fervently listening congregations. Religion has become not just a set of dos and don'ts any more. God and the Absolute, heaven and Hell, Here and Hereafter, are a reality that is capable of giving people something to live for and for some others to die for, communicating contradictory views on religion and spirituality, return of religion and return to religion, a faithful capital. Is it worth investing in a faithful Capital? If yes, then religion in whatever manifestation is also faced with severe challenges. If religion is returning, then its purpose must be for renewal and fresh expressions, as it is unsustainable if these returns are in their old forms. The world has moved on and is moving perhaps without direction and that these returns of religious fervor have a fundamental responsibility to shoulder community formation and the future of humankind. These returns *of religion* are no longer Asian, Arabian, Orthodox, Chinese, Western, Jewish, American or African alone as they have reached the global theaters in full force. The religions, however numerous, too are interdependent as expressions of deeper yearning of humanity here and hereafter. Independent religions and those with callous historical rivalries are doomed to decay and corrupt as any other human institutions, if they do not self-examine and are not self-critical. Today's religions in my opinion are challenged not so much by the secular but by the very adherents who seek meaning and spirituality. If they cannot find it within, they will find it elsewhere. Gone are the days of religious pomp and pageantry, as people would demand their religious institutions to be active participants in the creation of safer communities, to campaign for ecological improvement, trade justice, sustainable development with appropriate technology, global economic justice and improved governance. If these *double returns* by religions are not able to respond to the very existence of people and the planet then these religious traditions would this time be made redundant by their own devotees and followers. If salt has lost its saltiness, it is good for nothing except to be thrown away (Matt 5:13).

There is a challenge out there: religions can remain inactive in isolation, reactive in violence, enthusiastic for popularity or they can be proactive, engaged and alive, prove that religion in both private and public realms can make a difference, able to change, change for the better, a better society and a cleaner planet, claiming that it's a 'faithful capital', hence worth investing in it or else it will wither away.

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